A Note on Zola's method.

The art of Zola is based on certain theories, a view of humanity which he has addopted as his formula. As a deduction from his formula , he takes many things in human nature for granted, he is content to observe at second hand; and it is only when he cok
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Zola has defined art, very aptly, as nature seen through a temp
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The Collected Works of
Arthur Symons

Volume 8

Studies in Two Literatures

Studies in Two Literatures

by Arthur Symons

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London: Martin Secker

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I. STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE: ENGLISH WRITERS

WILLIAM MORRIS

WILLIAM MORRIS, supremely in our time, sought in art only its supreme quality, beauty. He was the pure type of the artist, and, not content with working upon his own craft, the craft of verse, he carried the principles of the artist into many secondary crafts, tapestry, wall-paper, printing, which he made his own, as the artists of the Renaissance made all arts and crafts their own; and, as those artists did, but in another way, he brought life within the scope of art, and willed that life, too, should be beautiful. His very Socialism, as I take it, was but an attempt at weaving the art of life into a beautiful pattern, and giving that beautiful pattern into the hands of poor people, in the hope that they might see its beauty. "Beauty," he once wrote, "which is what is meant by art, using the word in its widest sense, is, I contend, no mere accident of human life, which people can take or leave as they choose, but a positive necessity of life, if we are to live as nature meant us to; that is, unless we are content to be less than men."

In Mr. Mackail's *Life of William Morris* there is a passage which sums up, and to some extent explains, what to many seemed the curious variety of Morris's interests and occupations, all of which were really wrought together into a single structure. "Morris," he says, "did not graduate as a professional architect, nor in all his life did he ever build a

house. But for him, then and always, the word architecture bore an immense, and one might almost say a transcendental, meaning. Connected at a thousand points with all the other specific arts which ministered to it out of a thousand sources, it was itself the tangible expression of all the order, the comeliness, the sweetness, nay, even the mystery and the law, which sustain man's world and make human life what it is. To him the House Beautiful represented the visible form of life itself. Not only as a craftsman and manufacturer, a worker in dyed stuffs and textiles and glass, a pattern designer and decorator, but throughout the whole range of life, he was from first to last the architect, the master-craftsman, whose range of work was so phenomenal and his sudden transitions from one to another form of productive energy so swift and perplexing, because, himself secure in the centre, he struck outwards to any point of the circumference with equal directness, with equal precision, unperplexed by artificial subdivisionsof art, and untrammelled by any limiting rules of professional custom." Nothing better or truer has ever been said on a subject which has so often and so needlessly been misunderstood. In our hapless times of specialists, universality is looked upon, most of all by craftsmen themselves, as something foolish or dangerous or both. "If a man cannot write poetry while he is weaving at a handloom," said Morris, "he had better let poetry alone." Morris was the great living protest in our time against that narrowing conception of art which ties the artist down to one small bit of work, and then exalts the work done above the artist who did it. All the arts, said Morris, by his example, are so many expressions of the beautifying energy of man: why limit the outflow of your energy, if you have the energy to limit? Is there not some-

thing mean and crippled in a poet who can only make verses, a painter who can only paint pictures, a singer who has nothing but a voice, a wood-carver who has hands that can only carve wood? For the wise craftsman will realise that only certain aspects of things can be fitly rendered by his own particular form of art: should, then, all the rest of the universe become so much dead waste to him? The whole universe lives: let him live himself into it as widely as he can.

That was Morris' great lesson to our time, and in stepping outside art itself, in touching life, grasping it with both hands, with that tremendous grip of his, he showed us that the artist need not be isolated from humanity, even in the midst of twenty different forms of art-work. To Morris Socialism meant getting in touch with humanity, and, for all the heartiness of his ways, it was not an easy thing for him to get in touch with humanity. Morris was naturally much more interested in ideas than in people; it was visible in his eyes, which looked impatiently through people, seeing their own ideas if they had them, if not, going on persistently seeing his own. It was because Morris felt himself so painfully, so absorbingly an artist, that he first set himself to be one with others, if he could: he was always ready to help them as egoists usually are, but without love. He mastered the art of being human, as he had mastered the art of weaving tapestry: it was more difficult to him, he was never quite satisfied with his own progress in the more difficult art. And, though people did not always realise it (Socialists, I suppose, would realise it a little unwillingly), lecturing at Hammersmith was perhaps more than ever to be "the idle singer of an empty day."

"Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time," he

described himself in the prologue to *The Earthly Paradise*; and, indeed, Morris, alone among the poets of our age, was content to be that only, content to spend his days

making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights.

More than passion, or knowledge, or curiosity, or anything human or divine, he followed beauty, and he was justified of his choice; for his verse has more of the simplicity of beauty than the verse of any English poet since Keats. Where Browning is sometimes cumbered with the care of many important and unessential things; where Tennyson is often lacking through a too fastidious working upon too thin a surface; where Swinburne is carried away by his own music, and Matthew Arnold forgets that he is singing at all; where even Rossetti sometimes accepts strangeness for beauty; there is no temptation strong enough to lure Morris aside from the one path. He had not a great intellect, nor a passionate nature crying to give voice to itself. His most fatal lack was a certain lack of intensity. There is not a great line, there are but few separably fine lines, in the whole of his work. But every line has distinction, and every line is in its place.

Morris was an incomparable story-teller; or, to be precise, he can be compared in our literature only with Chaucer; and it would be rash to say, without premeditation, that Chaucer was a better story-teller than Morris. Chaucer had an incomparably wider range of mastery; he had to his hand the "humours" of all the world. Morris has none of Chaucer's sturdy humanity, his dramatic power, his directness; above all, his humour. But then the aim of Morris was something quite different from the aim of

Chaucer, whom I should call the novelist of poets, as Morris was the romance-writer. In several places he has called Chaucer "Master," as in *Life and Death of Jason*:

> *O Master, pardon me, if yet in vain*
> *Thou art my master, and I fail to bring*
> *Before men's minds the image of the thing*
> *My heart is filled with.*

But in temperament I would compare him rather with Spenser, of whom he has much of the dreamy and picture-weaving vision. Does not this sentence of Landor, describing Spenser, apply singularly well to Morris? "Spenser's is a spacious, but somewhat low chamber, heavy with rich tapestry, on which the figures are mostly disproportioned, but some of the faces are lively and beautiful; the furniture is part creaking and worm-eaten, part fragrant with cedar and sandal-wood and aromatic gums and balsams; every table and mantelpiece and cabinet is covered with gorgeous vases, and birds, and dragons, and houses in the air." This, however, we must except: that in Morris the figures are always in proportion, obey always the lines of conventional design.

To Morris the art of verse was as the art of tapestry; an art of clear design, in which the lines must be simple, and all the beauty must be found in the lines themselves. The words paint pictures; even emotion comes to him as a picture: he sees the lifted arm, tear-stained cheeks, the mouth curving to a smile. Of the words it may be said always that they are happily chosen, not that they are strenuously achieved; they have the grace of being quite the best that could happen, not that fineness which is of long search, rarity, and dear buying. Certainly this was deliberate on

his part; and deliberate was his use of the simplest words, which sometimes become a little cloying, and of the simplest rhythms, in which he uses few licences, and almost never attempts an individual effect in any single line; the occasional use of such words as "waking," rhyming to "sing," only adding to the "soft, withdrawing" sound of his fluid cadences. His rhymes are faint, gliding into one another stealthily; dying away, often, upon such vaguely accentuated words as "patiently," "listlessly." He aims at the effect of improvisation, and his verse becomes a sort of pathetic sing-song, like a croon, hardly ever rising or sinking in tone. With its languid, lulling monotony, its "listless chime," it has (especially in those heroic couplets which were finer in his hands than any other measure) the sound of a low plashing of sea-ripples on a quiet shore, a vague and monotonous and continuous and restful going on.

But while he chooses words partly for their gentleness and suave sound, he chooses them far more for their almost unconscious effect of colour; as separate, unimportant stitches in a tapestry, or slabs in a tesselated pavement, to be set together into pictures. His colours, like his designs, are all conventional; he has no half-tones, no subtleties of light and shade; his pictures, indeed, have some of the naïveté which existed before perspective. And as for the hearts and souls of the elegant persons of his pictures, we know them scarcely more than we know the joys and sorrows of an illuminated saint in a missal. These joys and sorrows are all in gold outline, here tender and there sorrowful; but they move us as pictures do, with the delicate and painless emotion of beautiful things. It is all part of the perfumed and cloudy atmosphere of the place, where these dreams wander through their half-existence; this Palace of Art in

which life is a coloured and fragrant thing, moving in fine raiment, to the sound of stringed instruments plucked softly.

It is curious, in an art so addressed to the senses, that Morris is so unsensuous in his writing, so modest and temperate, and with so little of the rapture of passionate things. When he achieves a rapture, it is a rapture of sheer beauty; as when the knight Walter first looks upon Venus, "O close, O close there, in the hill's grey shade!" It is when lovers see with each other's eyes, when the first happy trouble comes into their voices, at the moment when love first grows aware of itself, and not yet of the sorrow that is the growth of love. Tapestry does not appeal to the senses; and Morris's ideal of beauty, during the main part of his poetic career, was one in which there was no room for "violent delights," or any strangeness that was not tempered to a certain peace, a certain order. It is his merit that his pictures are always, as almost no one else's are, exquisitely in keeping throughout; yet we may reasonably regret that the intensity which marks many of the pieces in his first book, *The Defence of Guinevere*, died out in that first book, and is not to be found again in his work until *The Story of Sigurd*. He himself has no interest in the fortunes of his heroes and heroines when once they step outside the frame of his picture; in *The Life and Death of Jason* he leaves Medea, her deadly work done, telling us merely:

> *She came to Athens, and there long did dwell,*
> *Whose after-life I list not here to tell.*

All the world's a picture; and when Paris dies, crying on Helen,

> *yet the sky*
> *Changed not above his cast-back golden head,*
> *And merry was the world though he was dead.*

To read *Love is Enough*, or *The Earthly Paradise*, or *The Life and Death of Jason*, is like taking opium. One abandons oneself to it, and is borne on clouds as in a gondola of the air. Never was one so gently carried along, so imperceptibly, and with so luxurious a motion. There is not even enough sharpness of interest, or novelty in the progression, to jar one on the way. The only danger is that weariness which comes of overmuch repose.

And Morris at last realised that danger; or, rather, may be said to have satiated himself with his own enchantments. The early influences upon his work had been for the most part mediæval, Chaucer, the Anglo-Norman romances, the new mediævalism of Keats; and always the Odyssey, of which he came to do so fine a translation, so much finer than his translation of the Æneid; the simple picture-words of Homer being so much nearer to him than the jewelled and many-faceted words of Virgil. His first book, which invented a new movement, doing easily, with a certain appropriate quaintness, what Tennyson all his life had been trying to do, has all the exquisite trouble of his first awakening to the love of romance; and he did not again recover quite that naïve thrill of delighted wonder. But the art of almost the whole of his work is a joyous, courtly art; its colour and its sentiment, even when it deals with classical stories, being purely mediæval. The new influence begins to be felt in *The Lovers of Gudrun*, the last tale in the third volume of *The Earthly Paradise*. It is the influence of the Northern Sagas, which took possession of Morris as they took possession of Wagner, both having passed through a period of complete absorption in the knightly and romantic Middle Ages, and both, at the last, going back to the primitive antiquity of legend, and of Northern legend. With Morris,

we feel that certain energies, latent in the man from the first, and, indeed, compressed within certain limits by the exercise of a most energetic will, have at last been allowed free play. The simple, artificial English of the earlier books gives place to a new, and in a sense not less artificial, style, returning upon earlier English models, and forging for itself monosyllabic words which are themselves energies. In *The Story of Sigurd*, which remains his masterpiece of sustained power, he goes sheer through civilisation, and finds an ampler beauty shadowed under the dusk of the Gods. He gets a larger style, a style more rooted in the earth, more vivid with the impulse of nature; and the beauty of his writing is now a grave beauty, from which all mere prettiness is clean consumed away. And now, at last, he touches the heart; for he sings of the passions of men, of the fierceness of love and hate, of the music of swords in the day of battle.

COVENTRY PATMORE

THE most austere poet of our time, Coventry Patmore conceived of art as a sort of abstract ecstasy, whose source, limit, and end are that supreme wisdom which is the innermost essence of love. Thus the whole of his work, those "bitter, sweet, few, and veiled" songs, which are the fruit of two out of his seventy years, is love-poetry; and it is love-poetry of a quite unique kind. In the earlier of his two books, *The Angel in the House*, we see him, in the midst of a scientific generation (in which it was supposed that by adding prose to poetry you doubled the value of poetry) unable to escape the influence of his time, desperately set on doing the wrong thing by design, yet unable to keep himself from often doing the right thing by accident. In his later book, *The Unknown Eros*, he has achieved the proper recognition of himself, the full consciousness of the means to his own end; and it is by *The Unknown Eros* that he will live, if it is enough claim to immortality to have written the most devout, subtle, and sublimated love-poetry of our century.

Patmore tells us in *The Angel in the House*, that it was his intention to write

> *That hymn for which the whole world longs,*
> *A worthy hymn in woman's praise.*

But at that time his only conception of woman was the conception of woman as the lady. Now poetry has nothing

whatever to do with woman as the lady; it is in the novel, the comedy of manners, that we expect the society of ladies. Prose, in the novel and the drama, is at liberty to concern itself with those secondary emotions which come into play in our familiar intercourse with one another; with those conventions which are the "evening dress" by which our varying temperaments seek the disguise of an outward uniformity; with those details of life which are also, in a sense, details of costume, and thus of value to the teller of a tale, the actor on a stage. But the poet who endeavours to bring all this machinery of prose into the narrow and self-sufficing limits of verse is as fatally doomed to failure as the painter who works after photographs, instead of from the living model. At the time when *The Angel* was written, the heresy of the novel in verse was in the air. Were there not, before and after it, the magnificent failure of *Aurora Leigh*, the ineffectual, always interesting, endeavours of Clough, and certain more careful, more sensitive, never quite satisfactory, experiments of Tennyson? Patmore went his own way, to a more ingenious failure than any. *The Angel in the House* is written with exquisite neatness, occasional splendour; it is the very flower of the poetry of convention; and is always lifting the trivialities and the ingenuities to which, for the most part, it restricts itself, miraculously near to that height which, now and again, in such lines as "The Revelation," it fully attains. But it is not here, it is in *The Unknown Eros* alone, that Patmore has given immortality to what is immortal in perishable things.

How could it be otherwise, when the whole force of the experiment lies in the endeavour to say essentially unpoetical things in a poetical manner?

Give me the power of saying things
Too simple and too sweet for words,

was his wise, reasonable, and afterwards answered prayer. Was it after the offering of such a prayer that he wrote of

Briggs,
Factotum, Footman, Butler, Groom?

But it is not merely of such "vulgar errors" as this that we have to complain, it is of the very success, the indisputable achievement, of all but the most admirable parts of the poem. The subtlety, the fineness of analysis, the simplified complexity, of such things as *The Changed Allegiance*, can scarcely be overpraised as studies in "the dreadful heart of woman," from the point of view of a shrewd, kindly, somewhat condescending, absolutely clear-eyed observer, so dispassionate that he has not even the privilege of an illusion, so impartial that you do not even do his fervour the compliment of believing it possible that his perfect Honoria had, after all, defects. But in all this, admirable as it is, there is nothing which could not have been as well said in prose. It is the point of view of the egoist, of the "marrying man," to whom

Each beauty blossomed in the sight
Of tender personal regards.

Woman is observed always in reference to the man who fancies she may prove worthy to be his "predestinated mate," and it seems to him his highest boast that he is

proud
To take his passion into church.

which seems to me no worse than taking it into a one-night hotel with dirty bedclothes and smelly feet and garlic

At its best, this is the poetry of "being in love," not of love; of affection, not passion. Passion is a thing of flame, rarely burning pure, or without danger to him that holds that wind-blown torch in his hand; while affection, such as this legalised affection of *The Angel in the House*, is a gentle and comfortable warmth, as of a hearth-side. It is that excellent, not quite essential, kind of love which need endure neither pain nor revolt; for it has conquered the world on the world's terms.

Woman, as she is seen in *The Angel in the House*, is a delightful, adorable, estimable, prettily capricious child; demonstrably finite, capturable, a butterfly not yet Psyche. It is the severest judgment on her poet that she is never a mystery to him. For all art is founded on mystery, and to the poet, as to the child, the whole world is mysterious. There are experts who tell me that this world, and life, and the flowing of times past into times to come, are but a simple matter after all: the jarring of this atom against that, a growth by explicable degrees from a germ perhaps not altogether inexplicable. And there are the experts in woman, who will explain to me the bright disarray of her caprices, the strangeness of her moods, the unreason of her sway over man; assuring me that she is mysterious only because she is not seen through, and that she can never be seen through because into the depths of emptiness one can see but a little distance. Not of such is the true lover, the true poet. To him woman is as mysterious as the night of stars, and all he learns of her is but to deepen the mystery which surrounds her as with clouds. To him she is Fate, an unconscious part of what is eternal in things; and, being the liveliest image of beauty, she is to be reverenced for her beauty, as the saints are reverenced for their virtue. What

is it to me if you tell me that she is but the creature of a day, prized for her briefness, as we prize flowers; loved for her egoism, as we love infants; marvelled at for the exquisite and audacious completeness of her ignorance? Or what is it to me if you tell me that she is all that a lady should be, infinitely perfect in pettiness; and that her choice will reward the calculations of a gentleman? If she is not a flame, devouring and illuminating, and if your passion for her is not as another consuming and refining flame, each rushing into either that both may be commingled in a brighter ecstasy, you have not seen woman as it is the joy of the poet and the lover to see her; and your fine distinctions, your disentangling of sensations, your subtleties of interpretation, will be at the best but of the subject of prose, revealing to me what is transitory in the eternal rather than what is eternal in the transitory. The art of Coventry Patmore, in *The Angel in the House*, is an art founded on this scientific conception of woman. But the poet, who began by thinking of woman as being at her best a perfect lady, ended by seeing her seated a little higher than the angels, at the right hand of the Madonna, of whom indeed she is a scarcely lower symbol. She who was a bright and cherished toy in *The Angel in the House* becomes in *The Unknown Eros* pure spirit, the passionate sister of the pure idea. She is the mystical rose of beauty, the female half of that harmony of opposites which is God. She has other names, and is the Soul, the Church, the Madonna. To be her servant is to be the servant of all right, the enemy of all wrong; and therefore poems of fierce patriotism, and disdainful condemnation of the foolish and vulgar who are the adversaries of God's ordinances and man's, find their appropriate place among poems of tender human pathos, of ecstatic human

and divine love. And she is now, at last, apprehended under her most essential aspect, as the supreme mystery; and her worship becomes an almost secret ritual, of which none but the adepts can fathom the full significance.

Vision, in *The Unknown Eros*, is too swift, immediate, and far-seeing to be clouded by the delicate veils of dreams.

> *Give me the steady heat*
> *Of thought wise, splendid, sweet,*
> *Urged by the great, rejoicing wind that rings*
> *With draught of unseen wings,*
> *Making each phrase, for love and for delight,*
> *Twinkle like Sirius on a frosty night:*

that is his prayer, and it was not needful for him to

> *remain*
> *Content to ask unlikely gifts in vain.*

Out of this love-poetry all but the very essence of passion has been consumed; and love is seen to be the supreme wisdom, even more than the supreme delight. Apprehended on every side, and with the same controlling ardour, those "frightful nuptials" of the Dove and Snake, which are one of his allegories, lead upward, on the wings of an almost aërial symbolism to those all but inaccessible heights where mortal love dies into that intense, self-abnegating, intellectual passion, which we name the love of God.

At this height, at its very highest, his art becomes abstract ecstasy. It was one of his contentions, in that beautiful book of prose, *Religio Poetæ*, in which thought is sustained throughout at almost the lyrical pitch, that the highest art is not emotional, and that "the music of Handel, the poetry of Æschylus, and the architecture of the Parthenon are appeals

to a sublime good sense which takes scarcely any account of 'the emotions.'" Not the highest art only, but all art, if it is so much as to come into existence, must be emotional; for it is only emotion which puts life into the death-like slumber of words, of stone, of the figures on a clef. But emotion may take any shape, may inform the least likely of substances. Is not all music a kind of divine mathematics, and is not mathematics itself a rapture to the true adept? To Patmore abstract things were an emotion, became indeed the highest emotion of which he was capable; and that joy, which he notes as the mark of fine art, that peace, which to him was the sign of great art, themselves the most final of the emotions, interpenetrated for him the whole substance of thought, aspiration, even argument. Never were arguments at once so metaphysical and so mystical, so precise, analytic, and passionate as those "high arguments" which fill these pages with so thrilling a life.

There is absolutely no popular appeal, no extraneous interest in the timeliness of subject, or the peculiarities of treatment; nothing, in fact, to draw the notice of the average reader or to engage his attention. To the average reader the book must be nothing but the vainest speculation and the dullest theory. Yet, in many ways, it is one of the most beautiful and notable works in prose that have appeared in recent years. It is a book, argumentative as it is, which one is not called on so much to agree with or dissent from as to ponder over, and to accept, in a certain sense, for its own sake. Patmore is one of the few surviving defenders of the faith, and that alone gives him an interesting position among contemporary men of letters. He is a Christian and a Catholic, that is to say, the furthest logical development of the dogmatic Christian; but he is also a mystic; and his

spiritual apprehensions are so vivid that he is never betrayed into dogmatic narrowness without the absolution of an evident vision and conviction. And, above all, he is a poet; one of the most essential poets of our time, not on account of the dinner-table domesticities of *The Angel in the House*, but by reason of the sublimated love-poetry of *The Unknown Eros*, with its extraordinary subtlety of thought and emotion, rendered with the faultless simplicity of an elaborate and conscious art. His prose is everywhere the prose of a poet. Thought, in him, is of the very substance of poetry, and is sustained throughout at almost the lyrical pitch. There is, in these essays, a rarefied air as of the mountain-tops of meditation; and the spirit of their pondering over things, their sometimes remote contemplation, is always, in one sense, as Pater has justly said of Wordsworth, impassioned. Each essay in itself may at once be said to be curiously incomplete or fragmentary, and yet singularly well related as a part to a whole, the effect of continuity coming from the fact that these are the occasional considerations of a mind which, beyond that of most men, is consistent and individual. Not less individual than the subject-matter is the style, which in its gravity and sweetness, its fine, unforbidding austerity, its smooth harmony—a harmony produced by the use of simple words subtly—is unlike that of any contemporary writer, though much akin to Patmore's own poetic style.

The subjects with which these essays deal may be grouped under three heads: religion, art, and woman. In all Patmore's attitude is intensely conservative and aristocratic—fiercely contemptuous of popular idols and ideals, whenever he condescends to notice them. The very daring and very logical essay on *Christianity and Progress* is the clearest

and most cogent statement of Christianity as an aristocracy, in opposition to the current modern view of it as a democracy, that has been made since the democratic spirit made its way into the pulpit. "Let not such as these," says Patmore, "exalt themselves against the great Masters of the experimental science of Life, one of whom—St. Theresa, if I remember rightly—declares that more good is done by one minute of reciprocal communion of love with God than by the founding of fifty hospitals or of fifty churches."

It is from this point of view that Patmore writes :

"Many people doubt whether Christianity has done much, or even anything, for the 'progress' of the human race as a race ; and there is more to be said in defence of such doubt than most good people suppose. Indeed, the expression of this doubt is very widely considered as shocking and irreligious ; and as condemnatory of Christianity altogether. It is considered to be equivalent to an assertion that Christianity has hitherto proved a 'failure.' But some who do not consider that Christianity has proved a failure do, nevertheless, hold that it is open to question whether the race, as a race, has been much affected by it, and whether the external and visible evil and good which have come of it do not pretty nearly balance one another."

It is with the same view of things, from the same standpoint, that Patmore states his ideal of the poetic art, and condemns what he considers the current misconception of the subject. "I may go further," he declares, in his vivacious attack on *Emotional Art* "and say that no art can appeal 'to the emotions only' with the faintest hope of even the base success it aspires to. The pathos of such art (and pathos is its great point) is wholly due to a more or less vivid expression of a vague remorse at its divorce from truth

and order. The Dame aux Camélias sighs in all Chopin's music over her lost virtue, which, however, she shows no anxiety to recover, and the characteristic expression of the most recent and popular school of poetry and painting is a ray of the same sickly and in the most part hypocritical homage to virtue. Without some such homage even the dying and super-sensitive body of 'emotional' art loses its very faintest pretensions to the name of art, and becomes the confessed carrion of Offenbach's operas and the music-hall. Atheism in art, as well as in life, has only to be pressed to its last consequences in order to become ridiculous, no less than disastrous; and the 'ideal,' in the absence of an idea or intellectual reality, becomes the 'realism' of the brothel and the shambles."

What, then, is the ideal, the proper substance and manner of Poetry? It is thus defined in another essay, which contends that *Bad Morality is Bad Art*:

"The poet, as a rule, should avoid religion altogether as a direct subject. *Law*, the rectitude of humanity, should be his only subject, as, from time immemorial, it has been the subject of true art, though many a true artist has done the Muse's will and knew it not. As all the music of verse arises, not from infraction, but inflection of the law of the set metre, so the greatest poets have been those the *modulus* of whose verse has been most variously and delicately inflected, in correspondence with feelings and passions which are the inflections of moral law in their theme. Masculine law is always, however obscurely, the theme of the true poet; the feeling and its correspondent rhythm, its feminine inflection, without which the law has no sensitive or poetic life. Art is thus constituted because it is the constitution of life, all the grace and sweetness of which arise from

inflection of law, not from infraction of it, as bad men and bad poets fancy."

Again from the same standpoint, again with the same absolute and aristocratic outlook on the world, does Patmore "sing of the nature of woman"—the subject of his constant preoccupation as an artist, the one sufficing subject to which he has devoted all his art. The modern woman, one may suppose, is not likely to appreciate the precise manner in which Mr. Patmore exalts her sex. It is far too logical, too reasonable, too scrupulously according to nature; thus for example, in a passage of characteristically delicate wit:

"It is 'of faith' that the woman's claim to the honour of man lies in the fact of her being the 'weaker vessel.' It would be of no use to prove what every Christian man and woman is bound to believe, and what is, indeed, obvious to the senses of any sane man or woman whatever. But a few words of random comment on the text may, by adding to faith knowledge, make man and woman—woman especially—more thankful than before for those conditions which constitute the chief felicity of her life and his, and which it is one of the chief triumphs of progress to render ever more and more manifest. The happiest result of the 'higher education' of woman cannot fail to consist in the rendering of her weakness more and more daintily conspicuous. How much sweeter to dry the tears that flow because one cannot accede to some demonstrable fallacy in her theory of variable stars, than to kiss her into conformity to the dinner-hour or the fitness or unfitness of such-or-such a person to be asked to a picnic! How much more dulcet the *dulcis Amaryllidis ira* when Amaryllis knows Sophocles and Hegel by heart, than when her accomplishments extend only to a moderate proficiency in French and the pianoforte! It is a great

consolation to reflect that, among all the bewildering changes to which the world is subject, the character of woman cannot be altered; and that, so long as she abstains from absolute outrages against nature—such as divided skirts, freethinking, tricycles, and Radicalism—neither Greek, nor conic sections, nor political economy, nor cigarettes, nor athletics, can ever really do other than enhance the charm of that sweet unreasonableness which humbles the gods to the dust, and compels them to adore the lace below the last hem of her brocade!"

Such, then, and so consistent, is Patmore's attitude in matters of religion, of art, and of the relation of man and woman. We are concerned neither to defend nor to contend against it, admitting only that, granted the premises (which, no doubt, can be taken on certain grave and ancient warrants), the deductions from those premises are strictly logical, and, at the present day, as novel as they are logical. Patmore is inclined to be petulant, and he occasionally rides a hobby-horse so recklessly as to commit himself to incredible fallacies. But a book which attains perfection has never yet been produced, and Patmore's is close, very close indeed.

The particular subtlety of Patmore's mysticisim finds perhaps its counterpart in the writings of certain of the Catholic mystics: it has at once the clear-eyed dialectic of the Schoolmen and the august heat of St. Teresa. Here is passion which analyses itself, and yet with so passionate a complexity that it remains passion. Read, for instance, that eulogy of *Pain* which is at once a lyric rapture, and betrays an almost unholy depth of acquaintance with the hidden, tortuous, and delightful ways of sensation. Read that song of songs, *Deliciæ Sapientiæ de Amore*, which

seems to speak, with the tongue of angels, all the secrets of all those "to whom generous Love, by any name, is dear." Read that other, interrupted song,

Building new bulwarks 'gainſt the infinite,

"Legem tuam dilexi." Read those perhaps less quintessential dialogues in which a personified Psyche seeks wisdom of Eros and the Pythoness. And then, if you would realise how subtle an argument in verse may be, how elegantly and happily expressed, and yet not approach, at its higheſt climb, the point from which these other arguments in verse take flight, turn to *The Angel in the House*, and read "The Changed Allegiance." The difference is the difference between wisdom and worldly wisdom: wisdom being the purified and moſt ardent emotion of the intellect, and thus of the very essence of poetry; while worldly wisdom is but the dispassionate ingenuity of the intelligence, and thus of not so much as the higheſt subſtance of prose.

The word "glittering," which Patmore so frequently uses, and always with words which soften its sharpness, may be applied, not unsuitably, to much of his writing in this book: a "glittering peace" does indeed seem to illuminate it. The writing throughout is classical, in a sense in which perhaps no other writing of our time is classical. When he says of the Virgin:

Therefore, holding a little thy ſoft breath,
Thou underwent'ſt the ceremony of death;

or, of the eternal paradox of love:

'Tis but in ſuch captivity
The unbounded Heavens know what they be;

when he cries :

O Love, that, like a rose,
Deckest my breast with beautiful repose ;

or speaks of " this fond indignity, delight " ; he is, though with an entirely personal accent, writing in the purest classical tradition. He was accustomed always, in his counsels to young writers, to reiterate that saying of Aristotle, that in the language of poetry there should be " a continual slight novelty " ; and I remember that he would point to his own work, with that legitimate pride in himself which was one of the fierce satisfactions of his somewhat lonely and unacknowledged old age. There is in every line of *The Unknown Eros* that continual slight novelty which makes classical poetry, certainly, classical. Learned in every metre, Patmore never wrote but in one, the iambic : and there was a similar restraint, a similar refusal of what was good, but not (as he conceived) the highest good, all strangeness of beauty, all trouble, curiosity, the splendour of excess, in the words and substance of his writing. I find no exception even in that fiercely aristocratic political verse, which is the very rapture of indignation and wrath against such things as seemed to him worthy to be hated of God.

Like Landor, with whom he had other points of resemblance, Coventry Patmore was a good hater. May one not say, like all great lovers ? He hated the mob, because he saw in it the " amorous and vehement drift of man's herd to hell." He hated Protestantism, because he saw in it a weakening of the bonds of spiritual order. He hated the Protestantism of modern art, its revolt against the tradition of the " true Church," the many heresies of its many

wanderings after a strange, perhaps forbidden, beauty. Art was to him religion, as religion was to him the supreme art. He was a mystic who found in Catholicism the sufficing symbols of those beliefs which were the deepest emotions of his spirit. It was a necessity to him to be dogmatic, and he gave to even his petulances the irresistible sanction of the Church.

RICHARD JEFFERIES

THE early books of Richard Jefferies, those by which he won his fame, those, no doubt, on which his fame will rest, *The Gamekeeper at Home* and its immediate successors, owe but little of their charm to purely literary merits ; they may almost be said to owe their charm to the very absence of the literary element. They are bundles of jottings, notes taken direct from life in a reporter's note-book, observations recorded because they are observed, and in just the words in which they presented themselves, hasty impressions of life on the wing, impressions slowly imbibed and lengthily developed, scraps and samples picked and sorted and placed or thrown together, with little more of artistic adjustment than Nature herself expends on her heterogeneous collection of exhibits. Quickness of eye and faithfulness of hand are his two great qualities, as shown in these early books ; and it is, I think, in the impression of absolute veracity, not coloured with prepossessions, not distorted by an artistic presentment, that he has the advantage over Thoreau, so much his superior as a writer. These books are, both literally, and in the impression they convey, the work of a man who has grown up on a farm, who has lived in the open air, wandering in the fields and woods from morning till night with a gun across his shoulder, looking at everything with a free and open interest, and forgetting nothing. He is not a poet who comes to Nature

with a pantheist rapture, and yearns so strongly for her spirit that he goes at last quite through her outward form; nor a painter who values Nature for her lines and colours, her admirable suggestions for a work of art. He is content to see no more, he will be content with seeing no less, than the gamekeeper or the ploughboy sees without regarding: fields, and animals, and birds, just as they are in themselves. He will see (and everything that he sees he will remember, for memory is merely the crystallisation of intense interest) all that the sharpest, the most sympathetic observation can show him: what began instinctively, the habit of observing, will be followed up by set purpose, and so perseveringly, that he will think nothing of walking along a certain road daily, during a whole spring or summer, so that he may gain a thorough knowledge of the habits of the birds which frequent it. Consequently, there is hardly anything in "the life of the fields" that he has not seen or described; and to read those early books of his, must, to the town-dweller, be almost the equivalent of an actual walk in the country.

Such books as these must be valued for their exhilarating qualities: so few even of the best books freshen a jaded sense, or help to brighten our dull outlook on things! Jefferies brought the fields nearer London; he admitted the dingy folk of cities to the most select society of country nature. He made them the intimates of the birds and animals, whom indeed he knew better than his fellow-men. To those who know the country well there will be little actually novel in Jefferies' sketches; he writes almost wholly of things that one must have seen many times: things so familiar that our notions of them are blurred and hazy, like our notions of the wall-paper of a familiar room. Here

we see them all in black and white; and with all their details, which perhaps we never knew, or have forgotten. I have said that Jefferies knew the birds and animals better than his fellow-men. I think this may be emphasised. In *Hodge and his Masters* there are many clever sketches of village life, and they are generally true as far as they go; but set a chapter on the habits of birds against a chapter on the habits of men, and how much more insight you will find in the former than the latter! Jefferies will give you the flora and fauna of the village with incomparable accuracy; but for the villager, go to Hardy.

This lack of human interest, and the knowledge which is the fruit of interest, told heavily on Jefferies when, toward the close of his life, he tried to become a novelist. In his novels (*Greene Ferne Farm*, *The Dewy Morn*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, such delightful names as they have!) we meet with passages as full of charm as anything he ever wrote; but they are passages that have little to do with the story; and it is hard to see why he should have strung together a plot whose only use is that it serves to introduce these passages, which would unquestionably be better without it. One book, which in a certain sense is a story, must be excepted from this category: the fresh and delightful apologue or fairy-tale named *Wood-Magic*. Here, with a truer instinct, he has taken for his *dramatis personæ* Kapchack the magpie, Choo-hoo the wood-pigeon, La Schach the pretty jay, and of humankind only a little boy, Sir Bevis, who knows the language of the birds and creatures, and to whom they will talk as if he were one of themselves. The sequel to *Wood-Magic*, *Bevis*, though an interesting tale enough, sinks to the ordinary level of boys' books of adventure: it has some good fighting, and the inevitable desert island.

But though some of Jefferies' later books are disappointing, and seem to have been manufactured for a public, there are one or two which have a special, though in some cases a divided interest, and show the development of an almost unsuspected side of his nature. In the *Gamekeeper* and its companions there is little of the literary element, little form, little instinct of the pictorial except as an accident of nature: these negative qualities are, as I have said, in their way merits, for their absence gives us something which their presence could not give. Still, there is the lack; and by-and-by, as the freshness wore off his recollections and his pen began to drag, Jefferies discovered it, and, what is more wonderful, he supplied it. It was not always a satisfactory substitute, people thought, for what was lost: but there it was, unmistakable, a style, an attitude, a literary quality.

This new tendency, new as to its manifestation in his work, was the outcome of a passionate love of beauty, perhaps only another phase of that vivid interest in country life which inspired his earlier books. Doubtless it was latent from the first, but there is not a sentence indicating it in *The Gamekeeper at Home*, and only occasional signs of it in the *Wild Life in a Southern County*. Here we have the naturalist, the observer without *arrière-pensée*, the genuine countryman pursuing the picturesque with a gun. Take this sentence, for instance, from the *Gamekeeper*: "Once on a hawthorn branch in a hedge I saw a mouse descending with an acorn; he was, perhaps, five feet from the ground, and how and from whence he had got his burden was rather puzzling at first." Here the interest is in the thing itself, there is no attempt at painting a picture or making an impression, but simply at describing a curious circumstance

which has been observed. Now turn to this sentence which I take from "Golden-Brown," one of the chapters in the book called *The Open Air*: "Green foliage overhung them and the men with whom they were drinking; the white pipes, the blue smoke, the flash of a match, the red sign which had so often swung to and fro in the gales now still in the summer eve, the rude seats and blocks, the reaping-hooks bound about the edge with hay, the white dogs creeping from knee to knee, some such touches gave an interest to the scene." Here the thing in itself is of no interest; it is but a company of drunken men and women outside a village pothouse; but see how cunningly it is taken, how the touches of colour, making a picture of this piece of vulgar reality, are noticed and brought out, just as a painter would bring them out on his canvas. The straightforward observer has become an impressionist, he values Nature now for her suggestions. Thus he will write a brilliant piece of special-pleading to prove that Paris is "the plainest city of Europe"; another, a perfect triumph of the artistic spirit and of literary expression, to prove that the picturesqueness of Venice is nothing to the picturesqueness of the docks at the East End. There is no longer an interest in ships as ships, or in Paris for what it is rather than what it looks, or in the drunken labourers because they are drunken, and not good to have on a farm; a delight in beauty of whatever sort, of picturesqueness or the incentive of picturesqueness, has dominated every other sense. The lazy pleasantness of language which made the earlier books so easy to read has given place to a pungent, original style, not without traces of affectation at times, but full of novel felicities, sharp, precise, coloured, above all, as I said, pungent.

And now that curious lack of interest in men and women, which seemed always to leave a certain gap in the rural landscape, becomes supplied, in turn, by a sensuous and physical interest, the interest of the body and of bodily beauty. To Jefferies men and women were animals ; and he adores these beautiful animals, looking on them for their grace and strength and health, for their lines and contour, with a frank materialism which flowers into poetry. There is still no sense of companionship, no intimacy or communion of spirit, none of that human curiosity which was the very keynote of George Borrow, which Robert Louis Stevenson has felt so keenly and rendered with so insinuating an enthusiasm. But the delight in physical beauty, which is one phase only of the larger feeling, this he has to the full, and it inspires some wonderful pages. His rapture over some tiny process, some unregarded corner of Nature's handiwork (the articulation of the knee-joint, for instance : who before Jefferies ever saw anything in a knee ?), his phraseology, part lyrical, part technical of the physiologist, may indeed have its amusing side ; and if I remember, there was grave objection on the part of the critics to some bold analogy (it was in one of his novels, and the heroine was taking a walk) used to express the expansion and contraction of the chest in walking. But there was a poetry for him in these things, and the intense sincerity of his worship of Nature is proved by his devotion to the subordinate details of her workmanship.

Jefferies started, as we have seen, with serene and quiet transcripts of the country life about him. Serenity is a quality that life is quick to abrade with its constant, uneasy friction ; and the serenity wore off from Jefferies' spirit. He became an unquiet thinker, a dreamer, restless, *tourmenté* ;

the mind sharpened itself on the ravaged body. In this he was typical of our time, which breeds the frail intelligences it cannot satisfy nor support. His outlook on Nature through a closed window, his sick-chamber meditations on the exultant joys of health, his physical delight and satisfaction while the physical powers ebbed from him, all stamp him a child of the delicate and nervous nineteenth century. In his early blitheness he was of another age, or he played a rare pastoral delicately in ours. But the age which is not of pastorals conquered.

JAMES THOMSON

THE collected edition of James Thomson's poetical works, issued in 1894 by Messrs. Reeves and Turner, affords an opportunity, which has long been wanting, of considering in its entirety the scattered and partly lost work of a remarkable writer, who, for a short time, towards the close of an unfortunate existence, won something like real fame. The author of *The City of Dreadful Night* had to wait long for recognition; but it cannot be said that he failed, before the end, to receive at least the recognition which was his due. Of late his name has almost dropped out of sight; the critics of the hour have been too busy discussing the immortals of the moment. Yet here we have a considerable body of work, work which certainly aims at great things, work planned on a large scale, and carried out with an unquestionable force; work, too, which has been praised by those whose praise is scrupulous and weighty. How far does the work, looked at to-day, seem to justify the neglect of yesterday, or the appreciation of the day before yesterday?

It is a difficult question to answer, even to oneself. There is that about Thomson's work which is at all events interesting; it has a human appeal, almost like that of a distressed face, seen in passing, in the street. Incorrect, commonplace, slovenly, as it so frequently is, there is a certain breath of life in it; there is, too, an unusual quality of mind, unusual in a poet, at work behind all these tawdry and slipshod lines.

It has not the vice of so much correct and scholarly writing which passes for literature, and is, indeed, "literature," in the sense of Verlaine's scornful ejaculation: *Et tout le reste est littérature*! Good writing or bad writing, it is not mere writing. The circumstances of James Thomson's life are known; that "long defeat," in which love, and fame, and health, and faith, all deserting him, left him to the sordid misery of a garret in the dingiest quarter of London, with only the resources of drink and drugs, and the inevitable ending in the hospital. His work is the story of his own life, with its momentary jollities (as in *Sunday up the River*), its customary gloom (as in *The City of Dreadful Night*), and that strange, occasional mingling of tragedy and comedy in a fantastic transformation of reality (as in *Vane's Story*). It was not merely circumstances that made Thomson miserable; it is difficult to imagine a temperament such as his being anything else. His extreme sense of sin, which he tried to silence by blaspheming, would have done credit to the most devout Puritan. He was always, in his own despite, and to his own despair, a moralist; and his Hyde Park atheism is only the counterpart of the Hyde Park salvationist. He is incessantly concerned with spiritual problems, with the order of the universe and with his individual peace of mind; and it is to escape from his own mental tortures that he cries aloud.

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
To show the bitter, old, and wrinkled truth
Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth:
Because it gives some sense of power and passion
In helpless impotence to try to fashion
Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

And so the burden of his main poem is one of

> *Infections of unutterable sadness,*
> *Infections of incalculable madness,*
> *Infections of incurable despair.*

This tragic pessimism, so obviously and rootedly sincere, is as much a matter of temperament, demanding as purely pathological an explanation, as the inherited craving for drink which ruined the man's body. It is in this "anatomy of melancholy," in which he is generally engaged, that we see what was most intimate in Thomson; it is here, really, that he is at his best, despite the brilliance and novelty of some of his lighter work in livelier manners.

Among this lighter work there is much that demands consideration in any view of Thomson as a poet. He was ahead of the fashion in aiming at what we now call modernity; his work is, in a certain sense, more modern than that of any other considerable writer in verse. But in regard to his actual success in so difficult an endeavour, it is not quite easy to define the precise measure of attainment. The great problem presented itself to him, as it does to every writer: how to be real, true to life, and yet poetic, true to art. Thomson never quite mastered the problem: how few have ever mastered it! More than most, he cared for the trivial details, the casual accidents, of "Sundays out," and shop-girls' dancing-halls; and he tried to get the full value out of these things by a certain crudity in his transference of them to the canvas. To render vulgar life, it seemed to him necessary to be vulgar. It was in this that he made his radical misapprehension. Here is Mr. Frith with his *Derby Day*, as modern as you please, but with

only the commonness, the photographed surface, of things about us. For the real modernity we must turn to Degas; we find it in the new employment of a masterly and really classic art in the interpretation of just such actual things: the very race-horses, if you will, but how differently seen, and with what careful and expressive subtlety rendered! Thomson did much: he at all events caught the life at the moment of its movement; he was intensely vivid, amusing, and true to the lesser and more obvious truths of Nature. But he did not realise that to be modern is of all achievements the most difficult, that it requires the most perfect command of oneself and one's material, consummate art; and that here, more than elsewhere, a flaw, a lapse, is fatal alike to the illusion and to the distinction of success.

Thomson's poetic style, though it has breadth and at times dignity, and is almost always both impressive and incisive, is never, even in his most serious work, really finished. There is always thought at the back of it, but when it seems to him that he has expressed his thought clearly and trenchantly, it does not occur to him that the process is not ended; he does not labour, as the true artist labours, to find the one, perfect, final expression of that thought. Surely of all subjects likely to move him to fine utterance, the subject of Heine should have been the most certain. Yet, in *Vane's Story*, he can write:

> *Our poor Saint Heinrich! for he was*
> *A saint here of the loftiest class.*

He will begin a striking poem, *To Our Ladies of Death*, with this simple and powerful stanza:

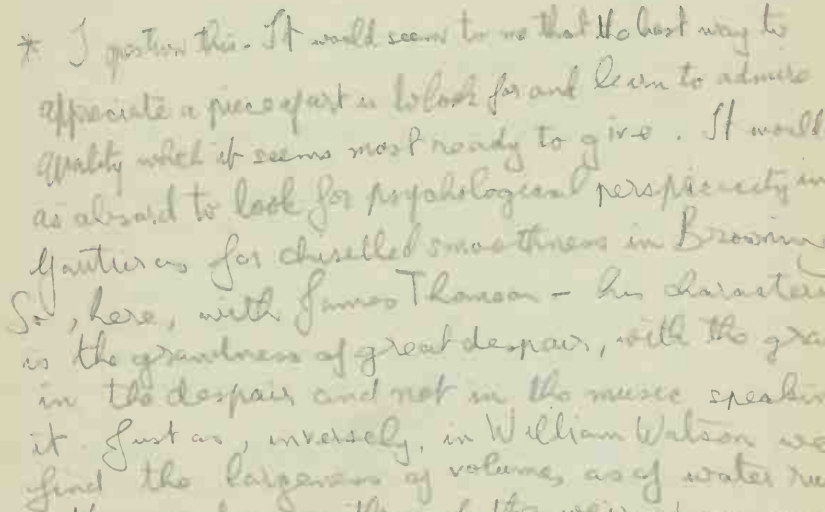
Weary of erring in this desert Life,
Weary of hoping hopes for ever vain,
Weary of struggling in all-sterile strife,
Weary of thought which maketh nothing plain,
I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,
And pray to Thee, O ever-quiet Death!
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

And then, a few stanzas further on, he will slip unconsciously into false and pompous commonplace such as:

Infatuate in a Siren's weird embrace.

He can be grandiose, and with real effect, and next moment merely turgid. At his best in such large movements as the three polysyllabic lines I have quoted from *The City of Dreadful Night*, he is rarely without a suspicion of commonness, which slips out, like a vulgarism in speech, at just the crucial moment. He formed his style, one would say, laboriously; it appears to be the result of much study, and the study of many models, of whom the chief were Shelley, Browning, and Heine. It was probably from Shelley that he acquired his fondness for vague symbolism; from Browning that he learnt a certain trick of writing verse in almost the same key as prose; from Heine that he copied, not always successfully, a manner of executing discords with intention. Out of these varying styles he built up a style which he made individual, indeed, but with an individuality which, above all things, lacked distinction. Contrast, for instance, *Vane's Story* with an equally modern poem in the same metre, Rossetti's *Jenny*. Here we see at once the difference between a perfectly finished work of art and an exceedingly clever and interesting impromptu.

Carelessness or incapacity, it matters not: poetic work which is not perfectly finished can never really prove satisfying, and in Thomson's very best work there is always something not quite satisfying. Yet how many qualities of almost the first order went to the making of what we cannot justly call a success! And there is always that personal interest, which, associated as it is with the pathos of Thomson's career, will perhaps do more than anything else to preserve his work from oblivion.



THOMAS GORDON HAKE

THE death of Gordon Hake, at the age of eighty-six, seemed, for a moment, to draw a little attention to the fact that a remarkable poet had been living and writing in our midst, almost unrecognised. It is true that the qualities of Hake's work were, from the first, fully admitted, and warmly praised, by one of the greatest of contemporary poets, who was also a critic of exceptional acuteness, Rossetti. Indeed, the only two review-articles which Rossetti ever wrote were written on two of Hake's books: *Madeline*, which he reviewed in the *Academy* in 1871, and *Parables and Tales* which he reviewed in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1873. But to the general public, even to the cultured public, the name of Dr. Hake has been hardly even a name. Only the accident of death could at last give a certain slight actuality to a writer who had many claims on the attention of a "fit audience."

No doubt Hake could never have been a popular poet; and failing, as he did, of actual greatness, it was not his to conquer admiration by force. But he had so many singular and interesting qualities; he did, long ago, almost perfectly, so many things which younger writers have since been admired for doing imperfectly; he appealed, or should have appealed, so strongly to that modern love of the unusual, the fantastic, the morbid, that it is surprising he should never have had so much as a little inner circle of

disciples. For how long has it not been the fashion to admire whatever is exotic! Well, never was an English poet more exotic than Hake. But no doubt the interest of his poetry is too exclusively intellectual, and concerned in too abstract a way with what Swinburne calls the "soul of sense." He goes straight to the essence of things, and the essential is always a little meagre and unsatisfying to the broad, general taste. In his first manner, it is true, the manner of the *Parables and Tales*, there was a Wordsworthian homeliness, and a quaintness which might have had a certain success, if the subject-matter had been less odd and disconcerting. But with the succeeding volumes, *New Symbols*, *Legends of the Morrow*, *Maiden Ecstasy*, a new manner comes into his work, a subtle, packed, remote, deliberately and precisely vague, style which corresponds more and more closely with the ever vaguer and more remote quality of the subject. At first, in a peculiar way, certainly, a realist, at least so far as outward details are concerned, he loses all interest in the reality of what is external. A new order of phenomena absorbs his attention, which becomes more and more internalised, more exclusively concerned with the phenomena of the soul, of morbid sensation, of the curiosities of the mind and the senses. Humanity is now apprehended in a more than ever generalised, and yet specialised, way, in its essence, where it becomes, if you will, an abstraction; or, if you will, for the first time purely individual. He is now, in the true sense of one of his own titles, a "Soul-Painter."

This attitude of mind, this manner of writing, the peculiar technique of the verse, with its invariable andante movement, its lingering subtleties of sound, colour, and suggestion, the almost medical curiosity of these researches into the stuff

of dreams, the very fibre of life itself, combined, certainly, to produce a new thing in poetry. The result is not an invariable success. Hake was not always entirely the master of his own enchantments. But, at his best, in such poems as *The Snake-Charmer*, *The Dancing-Girl*, we find an effect of extraordinary difficulty realised with extraordinary mastery.

One thing, and one thing alone, is attempted: the rendering of a certain sensation or series of sensations, a certain chain of movement, a certain philosophical idea. Not a word is to be admitted by accident, however happy, not a rhythm is to be allowed to flow freely, at its natural will; here is the effect to be rendered, and with the utmost economy of means, the utmost intensity of expression. Such a way of working (the extreme opposite to that of the spontaneous lyrical poet, to whom song is a natural outflow) naturally produces at times a sense of constraint, an actual awkwardness, which a more facile, or a more spontaneous, or a more easily contented, verse-writer would have avoided. And the attempt is sometimes after the unrealisable, a brave attempt, but one which a truer sense of the just limits of art would have prevented a fine artist from making. But how interesting, at the very least, are these sometimes foiled endeavours! It is a new kind of poetry, in which science becomes an instrument in the creation of a new, curious kind of beauty, the poetry, one might almost say, of pathology. Much of the best modern poetry, much in Baudelaire, in Poe, in Rossetti, in Swinburne's earlier work, has a certain pathological quality, which comes, partly indeed from an æsthetic fascination in what is diseased, but also largely from a purely personal, a personally unhealthy, disposition of mind. Now, in Hake, this disposition of mind is entirely

absent. Dealing by preference with morbid themes, he impresses one as being himself no more morbid than the surgeon whom we see eagerly entering a hospital. The curiosity is impersonal, a study, an outside mental interest. And for this very reason it can be woven deliberately into the stuff of poetry.

For what he has done, and still more for what he has attempted, Hake will remain, in the estimation of those who have any real apprehension of such matters, one of the most interesting poets of our time. He did much of really fine quality, he wrote at least a few poems which deserve to live. But perhaps his special interest in the future will be that he has opened up new possibilities to poetry, that he has at least indicated the way to do certain things which no one had ever attempted to do before.

MODERNITY IN VERSE

IN the poetry of Henley, so interesting always, and at times so admirable, I find an example to my hand of the quality of modernity in verse. For a man of such active and eager temperament, a writer of such intellectual vivacity, Henley's literary baggage is singularly small. It consists of several volumes of verse and of prose criticisms, some essays about painting, a few prefaces, and one or two plays written in collaboration with Robert Louis Stevenson. Ten years ago Henley's name was unknown. Journalists knew him as a clever journalist, and that was all. It was only by an accident that the editor (at that time) of the *Magazine of Art*, the brilliant reviewer of the *Athenæum*, was discovered by the general public in the character of a poet. The accident was somewhat curious. In 1887 a volume of *Ballads and Rondeaus* appeared in the Canterbury Series under the editorship of Gleeson White. It was a collection of all the tolerable work in French forms that could be found in English and American literature, and its consequence (for our salvation) was such an indigestion of ingenuity that scarcely a ballade, scarcely a rondeau, has seen the light since its publication. As a curiosity the book had its interest; containing, as it did, some of the splendid work of Swinburne, the exquisite work of Dobson, it could not but have its value; but, after all, its main interest and value lay in some five-and-thirty pieces signed W. E. Henley. Gleeson White explained in

his preface that he had discovered these pieces in a society paper called *London*, a paper which had two years of a very vivid existence during 1877–78, and that he had made his selection without the slightest idea that they were all by one author, and that author Henley. Written in the artificial forms of the ballade, the rondeau, the villanelle, they stood out from a mass of work, mainly artificial in substance as in form, by the freshness of their inspiration, the joyous individuality of their note. One felt that here was a new voice, and a voice with capacities for a better kind of singing. It was in answer to a demand which would take no denying (and how rarely does the British public ever make such a demand!) that *A Book of Verses* appeared in the following year. It was a complete success, was welcomed by the critics, talked about in the drawing-rooms, and even bought for ready money. In 1890 a volume of *Views and Reviews* was received with much curiosity, as a challenge that at all events had to be considered. In 1891 the play of *Beau Austin* (the work of Henley and Stevenson) was the literary sensation of the dramatic year, and, though not exactly a success on the boards, must be admitted to have presented to us the finest piece of comedy in action since *The School for Scandal*. And then, in 1892, came *The Song of the Sword*, or, as it is now more appropriately named, *London Voluntaries*, another challenge, and, in some sort, a manifesto.

There is something revolutionary about all Henley's work; the very titles, the very existence, of his poems may be taken as a sort of manifesto on behalf of what is surely a somewhat new art, the art of modernity in verse. In the *London Voluntaries*, for instance, what a sense of the poetry of cities, that rarer than pastoral poetry, the romance of what lies beneath our eyes, in the humanity of streets,

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if we have but the vision and the point of view! Here, at last, is a poet who can so enlarge the limits of his verse as to take in London. And I think that might be the test of poetry which professes to be modern: its capacity for dealing with London, with what one sees or might see there, indoors and out.

To be modern in poetry, to represent really oneself and one's surroundings, the world as it is to-day, to be modern and yet poetical, is, perhaps, the most difficult, as it is certainly the most interesting, of all artistic achievements. In music the modern soul seems to have found expression in Wagner; in painting it may be said to have taken form and colour in Manet, Degas, and Whistler; in sculpture, has it not revealed itself in Rodin? on the stage it is certainly typified in Sarah Bernhardt. Essentially modern poetry may be said to have begun in France, with Baudelaire. The art which he invented, a perverse, self-scrutinising, troubled art of sensation and nerves, has been yet further developed, subtilised, volatilised, rather, by Verlaine, who still remains the typical modern poet. In England we find the first suggestions of a really modern conception of poetical art in some of the smaller and finer poems of Browning. George Meredith's *Modern Love* almost realises an ideal. The poem stands alone in the literature of its time; moving by "tragic hints," to the cadence of an irony that achieves a quite new expression in verse, it gives voice, in that acid, stinging, bitter-sweet style made out of the very moods of these modern lovers, to all that is new, troubled, unexpressed, in the convolutions of passion, all that is strange, novel, and unexpected, in the accidents of passionate situation, among our sophisticated lovers of to-day. In quite another way Coventry Patmore has achieved wonders, not in the domestic

Angel, but in the less popular and immeasurably superior *Unknown Eros*, by working, with that extraordinarily delicate touch of his, on the emotions and destinies of the more spiritual kind of love, which is no less, in essentials and accidentals alike, "modern love." Had Walt Whitman only possessed the art, as he possessed, and at times revealed, the soul of poetry, it is possible that in him we should have found the typical modern poet. But his work remains a suggestion, not an accomplishment. In James Thomson we find a violent and inconsiderate attempt to deal with modern subjects, often in an old-fashioned way. He was a man of genius who never found the right utterance, but his endeavour was in the right direction. He indeed aimed at doing much of what Henley seems to me to have actually done.

To some of the writers I have named, and to some others, Henley owes not a little. The style of the *Hospital Sonnets* is founded on the style of *Modern Love*; both from the rhymed and unrhymed poems in irregular metres, it is evident that Henley has learnt something from the odes of the *Unknown Eros*; there are touches of Walt Whitman, some of the notes of Heine; there is, too, something of the exquisitely disarticulated style of Verlaine. But with all this assimilation of influences that are in the air, Henley has developed for himself a style that becomes in the highest degree personal, and one realises behind it a most vigorous, distinct, and interesting personality. Alike as a human document and as an artistic experiment, the "rhymes and rhythms" named *In Hospital* have a peculiar value. Dated from the Old Edinburgh Infirmary, 1873–75, they tell the story of life in hospital, from the first glimpse of the "tragic meanness" of stairs and corridors, through the horrors of the operation, by way of visitors,

doctors, and patients, to the dizzy rapture of the discharge, the freedom of wind, sunshine, and the beautiful world. The poet to whom such an experience has come, the man, perhaps, whom such an experience has made a poet, must be accounted singularly fortunate. Of the men who rhyme, so large a number are cursed with suburban comforts. A villa and books never made a poet; they do but tend to the building up of the respectable virtues; and for the respectable virtues poetry has but the slightest use. To roam in the sun and air with vagabonds, to haunt the strange corners of cities, to know all the useless, and improper, and amusing people who are alone very much worth knowing; to live, as well as to observe life; or, to be shut up in hospital, drawn out of the rapid current of life into a sordid and exasperating inaction; to wait, for a time, in the anteroom of death: it is such things as these that make for poetry. Just as those months in prison had their influence on Verlaine, bringing out in his work a deeper note than even the passionate experiences of early life, so that hospital experience has had its influence upon Henley. The very subject, to begin with, was a discovery. Here is verse made out of personal sensations, verse which is half physiological, verse which is pathology; and yet, at its best, poetry. It is one of the modern discoveries that "the dignity of the subject" is a mere figure of speech, and a misleading one. See what Whistler can make out of "Brock's Benefit": in place of fireworks and vulgarity you have a harmony in black and gold, and a work of art. See what Degas can discover for you in the crossing of colours, the violent rhythm of movements, the crowded and empty spaces, of a ballet rehearsal. And so, instead of prattling about Phyllis, Henley has set himself to the task of rendering the more

difficult poetry of the disagreeable. And in these curious poems, the sonnets and the "rhythms," as he calls his unrhymed verse, he has etched a series of impressions which are like nothing else that I know in verse. What an odd, and, in its way, admirable triumph of remembered and recorded sensation is this picture, for instance, "The Operation":

You are carried in a basket,
Like a carcass from the shambles,
To the theatre, a cockpit
Where they stretch you on a table.

Then they bid you close your eyelids,
And they mask you with a napkin,
And the anæsthetic reaches
Hot and subtle through your being.

And you gasp and reel and shudder
In a rushing, swaying rapture,
While the voices at your elbow
Fade—receding—fainter—farther.

Lights about you shower and tumble,
And your blood seems crystallising—
Edged and vibrant, yet within you
Racked and hurried back and forward.

Then the lights grow fast and furious,
And you hear a noise of waters,
And you wrestle, blind and dizzy,
In an agony of effort,

Till a sudden lull accepts you,
And you sound an utter darkness . . .
And awaken . . . with a struggle . . .
On a hushed, attentive audience.

And we feel, and it seems to be by a new process that we are made to feel, the long nights of lying awake, the restlessness of the tumbled bed, the sound of a leaking cistern when, "at the barren heart of midnight," it "taps upon the heartstrings": the long days of wondering at the spring through one's prison windows, with only the change of a new patient brought in (the man who had tried to cut his throat, the man whose spine was broken) or occasionally a visitor, the "Apparition" (who, we know, was Stevenson), the "Interlude" of a New Year's frolic among the patients. Here is verse which seems, like the violin-playing of Sarasate, to be made out of our nerves; verse which, if it almost physically hurts us, does so in common with many of our favourite renderings of the arts.

"In Hospital" gives us one side of Henley's talent, and it throws a vivid light on the conditions under which so much brave work has been done. For Henley, of all the poets of the day, is the most strenuously certain that life is worth living, the most eagerly defiant of fate, the most heroically content with death. There is, indeed, something of the spirit of Walt Whitman in his passion for living, his acceptance of the hour when man,

> *Tired of experience, turns*
> *To the friendly and comforting breast*
> *Of the old nurse, Death.*

His special "note," in the earlier work particularly, is a manly Bohemianism, a refreshingly reckless joy in the happy accidents of existence. Always insistently modern, with such curious use of "hansoms," or "fifth-floor windows," of bathers that "bob," of "washermaids" in the midst of "a shower of suds," he has set some

of the most human of emotions to a music that is itself curiously modern.

There is a wheel inside my head
Of wantonness and wine,
A cracked old fiddle is grunting without;
But the wind with scents of the sea is fed,
And the sun seems glad to shine.

The sun and the wind are akin to you,
As you are akin to June:
But the fiddle! . . . it giggles and buzzes about,
And, love and laughter! who gave him the cue?—
He's playing your favourite tune.

There is a snatch, a jingle, which, slight as one may call it, seems to me to give a particular, well-known, hardly defined sensation with ingenious success. It is a sensation which is so vague in itself, so vague and delicious, a frivolous, an inconstant, an inconsequent sensation, born of chance and happy idleness, and a pleasant and unimportant memory, that to render it requires a more genuine attack of what we call inspiration than I know not how many fine, sober-pacing sonnets, marching to order. Songs like this, and like so many of Henley's, are only possible to a rare union of a very special temperament (more often found in people who are not writers) and a very special artistic endowment. There are poets who could express everything if they could only feel anything; others who feel acutely, but can never give out in poetry what they have received in sensation. Perhaps the typical example of the latter was Lord Lytton. A diplomatist, a man of the world, a traveller, he was a diligent

student of life, a man of many capacities, many adventures, with infinite opportunities and the keenest desire to profit by them. His personal appreciation of the human comedy was immense; his own part in it was constant, considerable, and to himself always an excitement. Yet, after all, he was never able to strike the personal note in verse: it is only from some stray suggestion that one divines the genuine emotion that has doubtless really awakened this music which he plays to us with studied fingers on a borrowed lute. A large part of contemporary verse is, of course, concerned with quite other issues, and does not even try to do what may well seem the one thing worth doing, the one thing left to be done. This, which Stevenson has done in prose, Henley has done in verse. One might call it personal romance, the romance of oneself, just what nine-tenths of the world never discover at all, even for private use. I feel a bourgeois solemnity in much of the really quite good, the very respectable work in verse that is done nowadays; bourgeois, for all its distinction, of a kind. Our fine craftsmen are aghast at passion, afraid of emotion, ashamed of frivolity; only anxious that the sentiment as well as the rhyme should be right. It is the bourgeois, perhaps I should say the genteel, point of view: poetry from the clubs for the clubs. I am inclined to believe that no good poetry was ever written in a club armchair. Something in the air of those ponderous institutions seems to forbid the exercise of so casual a freak as verse. And with Henley it is indeed casual; casual as one's moods, sensations, caprices; casual as the only aspect of fate that we are quite certain of.

To say this is not to deny to Henley some of the deeper qualities of song. His outlook on life is joyous, in spite of

misfortune; his outlook on destiny and death is grave, collected, welcoming.

Crosses and troubles a-many have proved me.
One or two women (God bless them!) have loved me.
I have worked and dreamed, and I've talked at will.
Of art and drink I have had my fill.
I've comforted here, I've succoured there.
I've faced my foes, and I've backed my friends.
I've blundered, and sometimes made amends.
I have prayed for light, and I've known despair.
Now I look before, as I look behind,
Come storm, come shine, whatever befall,
With a grateful heart and a constant mind,
For the end I know is the best of all.

There, is a sort of epilogue, or last will and testament, and it is very explicit. Prizing in life much that is merely delightful, and the charm of passing moments, what he prizes most of all is the emotion of vital deeds, the ecstasy of conflict, the passion of love, of patriotism:

What have I done for you,
England, my England?
What is there I would not do,
England, my own?

the vivid sense of life "at the very top of being." To quote some of his own words, it is "the beauty and the joy of living, the beauty and the blessedness of death, the glory of battle and adventure, the nobility of devotion—to a cause, an ideal, a passion even—the dignity of resistance, the sacred quality of patriotism." He is ashamed of none of the natural human instincts, and writes of women like a man,

without effeminacy and without offence, content to be at one with the beneficent seasons, the will of nature. And has he not written, once and for all, the song of the soul of man in the shadow of the unknown? Such a song is the equivalent of a great deed.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

But I find myself returning to the *London Voluntaries* as perhaps the most individual, the most characteristically modern, and the most entirely successful, of Henley's work in verse. Here the subject is the finest of modern subjects, the pageant of London. Intensely personal in the feeling that transfuses the picture, it is with a brush of passionate impressionism that he paints for us the London of mid-

summer nights, London at "the golden end" of October afternoons, London cowering in winter under the Wind-Fiend "out of the poisonous east," London in all the ecstasy of spring. The style is freer, the choice of words, the direction of rhythms, more sure, the language more select and effectual in eloquence, than elsewhere. There is no eccentricity in rhythm, no experimentalising, nothing tentative. There is something classical, a note (shall we say?) of *Lycidas*, in these most modern of poems, almost as if modernity had become classical. The outcome of many experiments, they have passed beyond that stage into the stage of existence.

Revolutionary always, Henley has had a wholesome but perilous discontent with the conventions of language and of verse. He is an artist who is also a critic, and the book of *Views and Reviews*, striking on its own account, has its value also in illustration of his artistic principles, preferences, and innovations. That book ("less a book," the author tells us, "than a mosaic of scraps and shreds recovered from the shot rubbish of some fourteen years of journalism") shows us an active and varied intelligence, precipitately concerned with things in general, very emphatic in likes and dislikes, never quite dispassionately, always acutely, honestly, eagerly. His characteristics of feeling and expression, and not any reasoned or prejudiced partiality, make him the champion or the foe of every writer with whom he concerns himself. Brilliant, original, pictorial, his style tires by its pungency, dazzles by its glitter. Every word must be emphatic, every stroke must score heavily, every sentence must be an epigram or a picture or a challenge. With a preference, he tells us, for the "unobtrusive graces," for "tranquil writing," for "eloquence without adjectives,"

he is consistent in his negation of all these ideals of the urbane style. And, with this, immense cleverness, an acuteness that pierces and delights to pierce, an invention of phrases that is often of the essence of criticism, an extensive knowledge, extensive sympathies. His vocabulary is unusually large, and it is used, too recklessly indeed, but in a surprisingly novel, personal way. Turning to the poems, we find many of the faults of the prose, but we find also that the artist in verse is far more careful than the craftsman in prose, and that he has curbed himself to a restraint in the debauch of coloured and sounding words, still sufficiently coloured and sounding for an equally novel and personal effect. What Henley has brought into the language of poetry is a certain freshness, a daring straightforwardness and pungency of epithet, very refreshing in its contrast with the traditional limpness and timidity of the respectable verse of the day. One feels indeed at times that the touch is a little rough, the voice a trifle loud, the new word just a little unnecessary. But with these unaccustomed words and tones Henley does certainly succeed in flashing the picture, the impression upon us, in realising the intangible, in saying new things in a new and fascinating manner. Here, for instance, is an impression of night and the sea, in their mood of deadly companionship :

A desolate shore,
The sinister seduction of the moon,
The menace of the irreclaimable sea.

Flaunting, tawdry and grim,
From cloud to cloud along her beat,
Leering her battered and inveterate leer,
She signals where he prowls in the dark alone,

Her horrible old man,
Mumbling old oaths and warming
His villainous old bones with villainous talk—
The secrets of their grisly housekeeping
Since they went out upon the pad
In the first twilight of self-conscious Time ;
Growling, obscene and hoarse,
Tales of unnumbered ships,
Goodly and strong, companions of the Advance,
In some vile alley of the night
Waylaid and bludgeoned—
Dead.

Deep cellared in primeval ooze,
Ruined, dishonoured, spoiled,
They lie where the lean water-worm
Crawls free of their secrets, and their broken sides
Bulge with the slime of life. Thus they abide,
Thus fouled and desecrate,
The summons of the Trumpet, and the while
These Twain, their murderers,
Unravined, imperturbable, unsubdued,
Hang at the heels of their children—she aloft
As in the shining streets,
He as in ambush at some fetid stair.
The stalwart ships,
The beautiful and bold adventurers !
Stationed out yonder in the isle,
The tall Policeman,
Flashing his bull's-eye, as he peers
About him in the ancient vacancy,
Tells them this way is safety—this way home.

This vigorous and most modern piece, with others of Henley's "rhythms," seems to me, in its way, so satisfying, that I sometimes wonder whether it is an unreasonable prejudice that inclines me to question the wisdom of doing without rhyme in measures that seem to demand it. The experiment has been made by Heine, by Matthew Arnold, and undoubtedly with a certain measure of success. But to do without rhyme is to do without one of the beauties of poetry, I should say one of the inherent beauties. Our ears are so accustomed to it that they have come to require it, and it is certain, for one thing, that no rhymeless lyric could become really popular, and extremely likely, for another, that an innovation which begins by dropping rhyme will end by abandoning rhythm. It has been tried in France, persistently, most ingeniously, never, I think, successfully. The example of the French Decadents should be a warning to those in England who are anxious to loosen the bonds of verse. Everything that can be done has been done; there are treatises on poetical orchestration as well as examples of it; there is a *Pèlerin Passionné* and its little fame to boast of. Yet the really great, the really modern poet of France has always held aloof from these extravagances, and he has given his opinion very frankly on those young *confrères* who reproached him "with having kept a metre, and in this metre some censure, and rhymes at the ends of the lines. *Mon Dieu!*" he adds, "I thought I had 'broken' verse quite sufficiently." Yet supposing even that one admits the legitimacy of the experiment, is not the inexpediency of it somewhat strongly indicated by the deeper impressiveness, the more certain mastery of the *London Voluntaries* which are rhymed? There, surely, is Henley's most satis-

factory work, his entirely characteristic rendering of modern subjects in appropriate form. A new subject, an individual treatment, a form which retains all that is helpful in tradition, while admitting all that is valuable in experiment; that, I think, is modernity becoming classical.

WILLIAM WATSON

WHY, I have sometimes asked myself, did not Pater say the right words on a writer greater than Mérimée, George Meredith? I imagine that he never admired his novels enough to try his hand on a subject not quite his own. Certain books, I confess, ought to have been launched at the British Philistine, like David's one convincing pebble, straight to the forehead. I confess also (my own fault it was in regard to Meredith) that to write about Carlyle, Swinburne, or Meredith, without unconsciously reproducing some tricks of manner, is a feat of which any man might be proud.

The Egoist is a wonderful book, and in its elemental comedy it challenges Congreve and even Molière; but in the elemental tragedy of certain parts of *Rhoda Fleming* and *Richard Feverel*, he challenges Webster, or almost Shakespeare. Yet the uncouthness that disfigures certain pages in *Richard Feverel* is a mere after-taste of Arabian extravagance. It is a new kind of uncouthness that comes into prominence in *The Egoist*—that exaggeration of qualities which one sees in the later works of men who have a pronounced style, even in the case of Browning. No prose writer of our time has written finer or viler English than Meredith. It is a mistake to treat him as if he were stylist first, and novelist afterwards, as Flaubert might almost be said to be. Meredith is a conscious artist always—as conscious as Goncourt, with

whom he may be compared for his experimental treatment of language, his attempt to express what has never been expressed before by forcing words to say more than they are used to say. Sometimes they give his message, but ungraciously, like beaten slaves; sometimes the message seems to go astray. That is why Englishmen, forgetting triumph after splendid triumph of style, will sometimes tell you that Meredith cannot write English, just as Frenchmen gravely assure one another that the novels of the Goncourts are written in any language but French.

That astonishing little volume, *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside*, published in 1862, has never received anything like justice except at the hands of such a fellow-craftsman as Swinburne. While I for one cannot but feel that Meredith works more naturally, with a freer hand, in prose than in verse, that poem of *Modern Love* seems to me among the masterpieces of contemporary poetry. It is the most distinctly modern poem ever written. There has been nothing like it in English poetry: it brings into our literature something fundamentally new, essentially modern. Side by side with this super-subtle study of passion and sensation, we have the homely realism of "Juggling Jerry" —a poem which can only be compared with Burns's "Jolly Beggars" for triumphant success in perhaps the most difficult kind of literature.

So far I quote from an old article of mine, which was answered by William Watson. Here is part of his answer, printed in *The Academy*. "Now I should like to ask, what has the British Philistine done that he should have a book shied at his head in the way Mr. Symons thinks desirable? As regards Meredith, it seems to me that the British Philistine has been most exemplary in what he would call

the discharge of his duty. He has tried his very best to read Meredith, and has failed; or he has read Meredith, but has failed in the attempt to enjoy him. I fancy, however, that when Meredith's devotees speak of the British Philistine, they really mean the vast majority of the public, and it seems to me a little absurd, that because there is an author whose writings the public are comparatively indifferent to, it should be constantly assured that the only person not in the least responsible for such indifference is the author. Other writers have achieved popularity before Meredith. Perhaps the best proof of the futility of trying to convert people into an attitude of admiration by 'aiming' a book at them is afforded by Meredith's novels themselves. They are, in Mr. Symons's sense of the word, 'aimed' at the British Philistine, if ever novels were. He has been pelted through I do not know how many volumes—but have the missiles converted him?"

I leave all these questions unanswered, as they deserve no answer, after Time's verdict on Meredith. Now, what was, and is, the place of William Watson in literature? The difference between Literature and what is pre-eminently literary may be clearly illustrated on examination of his poems. No poems written in our time are more literary. They come to us asking to be received on account of their legitimate lineal descent from earlier poets, from Wordsworth, from Matthew Arnold for instance. "If," says the writer, frankly—

If I be indeed
Their true descendant, as the veriest hind
May yet be sprung of kings, their lineaments
Will out, the signature of ancestry
Leap unobscured, and somewhat of themselves
In me, their lowly scion, live once more.

Many of the poems are about poets, or about books; some are purely critical. And they are indeed, as they profess to be, in the tradition; they strike no unfamiliar note to any ears acquainted with the music of English poetry. Their range is limited, but within it they exhibit an unquestionable mastery of a particular kind of technique. Few lines are bad, all are careful, many are felicitous. Every poem has a certain neatness and order about it. The spirit of the whole work is orderly, reticent, and dignified. Nothing has been left to chance, or to the appeal of lawless splendours. An artist has been at work. At work on what? At all events, not on the only really satisfactory material for the poet—himself. Watson tells us that he has chosen the best of himself for giving to the world:

I have not paid the world
The evil and the insolent courtesy
Of offering it my baseness for a gift.

Well and good; but has he, in choosing among his selves, chosen really the essential one, base or not base, ignoble or not ignoble? He has chosen the self that loves good literature, thinks estimable thoughts, feels decorous emotions, and sets all this into polished and poetical verse. That is enough for the making of literary poetry, but not for poetry which shall be literature.

Watson, in his study of the great writers, seems never to have realised that what matters chiefly, what tells, is not the great phrase, but the personality behind the phrase. He has learnt from many writers to make phrases almost as fine as those writers have made; his phrases are never meaningless in themselves, and they can be exquisite in their form. But the phrase, coming with nothing but its own

significance behind it, a rootless flower, deriving no life from the soil, fails to convey to us more than an arid, unsatisfying kind of pleasure. There it is, a detached thing; to be taken, you may say, for what it is worth; only, live words will not be so taken. Compare Watson's *Ode to Autumn* with the *Ode to Autumn* of Keats. The poem is one of Mr. Watson's best poems; it is full of really poetical phraseology. But the ode of Keats means something in every word and it means Keats quite as much as autumn. Watson's poem means neither autumn nor Watson; it represents Watson setting himself to describe autumn.

Take his *Hymn to the Sea*. It is a long piece of exultant rhetoric, very finely imagined, full of admirable images; the most beautiful similes are gathered and brought together to represent the sea's multitudinous moods; but when the poem is finished, and you have admired it at leisure, you do not feel that this poet loves the sea. The poetry of Byron is assailable on many sides, but when he wrote those too rhetorical lines, now hackneyed almost out of recognition, beginning—

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!

he wrote out of his heart, as nearly as he could, and the lines, faulty as they are, have remained alive ever since. Watson's verse is very much better verse, but will

Grant, O regal in bounty, a subtle and delicate largess,

come back to men's lips as often, or for as long a time, as those faulty lines of Byron's?

In his *Apologia* Watson replies to those who have complained that he has brought nothing new into poetry:

I bring nought new
Save as each noontide or each Spring is new,
Into an old and iterative world.

And he asks :

Is the Muse
Fall'n to a thing of Mode, that must each year
Supplant her derelict self of yesteryear?

But he declines to see that the new thing which every generation rightly asks of every new poet is by no means " mode," or empty fashion of writing, but the one essential thing, personality, which can never be twice the same. The reason why you will not find any two poets writing in the same way is that every genuine poet has to express himself in his own way, whether it be by offering his own " baseness for a gift," like Villon, or by building a new heaven and a new hell, like Dante. The maker of literature puts this new thing into his work, in the mere act of making it, and it stands out, as plainly as his signature, in every line he writes. Not to find it is to have fallen upon work which is but literary, " books made out of books " : Walt Whitman thought that such " pass away."

In that *Apologia* from which we have already quoted Watson indignantly denounces those who think " all Art is cold " if " an ardour not of Eros' lips " is in it, and he attempts to indicate that state of vision in which man may know

A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
Than comes of commerce with mortality.

Does he then,

In silence, in the visionary mood,

reach this ecstatic state? If so, it has left no impression on his poetry. In this poetry there is no vision, only speculation about vision ; no ecstasy, only a reasonable meditation. He speaks of God, " the Whole," the " cosmic descant,"

and the large words remain empty. In such poems as *The Unknown God* and *The Father of the Forest* we seem to have been taught a lesson, read out in a resonant, well-controlled voice ; nothing has been flashed upon us, we have overheard nothing.

And, indeed, of how little of this poetry can we say, in the words of Mill's great definition, that is has been overheard ! Its qualities, almost, though not quite, at the best, are the qualities of good oratory. Watson began by writing epigrams, admirable of their kind, with a more lyric nineteenth-century handling of the sharp eighteenth-century weapon. The epigram lies at the root of his work—that is to say, something essentially of the quality of prose. He is a Pope who has read Keats. Oratory or the epigram come into his most characteristic passages, as in the well-known and much-admired lines on the greatness and littleness of man,

Magnificent out of the dust we came
And abject from the Spheres.

Now that, striking and effective as it is, is an antithetical ingenuity which a really fine poet would have gone out of his way to avoid. It is oratory, not poetry, and it would make good oratory, for there point has need of all its sharpness ; oratory is action.

It is through this oratorical quality of mind that Watson's style, though so ordered and measurely, often leaves an impression of having been deliberately heightened above the level of ordinary speech. The great things in poetry are song at the core, but externally mere speech. Think of some actual, anonymous Elizabethan song, and then read the piece which Watson has called *Song in Imitation of the Elizabethans*. It is not merely that he has not captured the

exact note of the period, but rather copied the note of a later period; such lines as

Idly clanged the sullen portal,
Idly the sepulchral door,

are not direct speech, and can therefore never become pure song. They are dressed in poetical phraseology, which is a very different thing.

It is curious to find this quality in a writer who is in every sense so critical. Behind a great deal of Watson's work there is the critical intelligence, not the poetical temperament. *Wordsworth's Grave* is written in discipleship to Matthew Arnold, and it is not Arnold when he is at his best—the Arnold of *Sohrab and Rustum* and *The Sick King in Bokhara*—that Watson has approached, but that half poet, half prose writer who wrote the *Obermann* poems. The foundation of those poems is prose, and a great deal of their substance is no more than rhymed prose. But at times the poet flashes out, transfiguring material and form for the moment, before he drops back into prose again. Watson's work is more on a level; he neither falls so low nor rises so high. But, even more than with Arnold, the substance of it is criticism, and the thinking and the style suggest the best kind of prose. Set the poem, with its finely chosen epithets and phrases—"Impassioned quietude," "Thou wast home," "Thou hadst, for weary feet, the gift of rest," "The frugal note of Gray," and the like—beside Pater's essay on Wordsworth, and you will find many points of resemblance, and not only in the echo of "impassioned quietude" from Pater's "impassioned contemplation." Compare it with Matthew Arnold's essay on Wordsworth and you will again find many points of resemblance, not

only in detail, which would not matter, but also in the whole way of approaching and handling the subject. Does the rhyme bring in any essential difference between specimens of fine prose and this poem, so well thought out, so poetically expressed? There lies the whole question, for if it does not bring such a difference, can it be accepted as poetry, as an adequate kind of poetry?

Criticism, though it may find place in a poem (as in Shelley's Letter to Maria Gisborne), can never be the basis of poetry. Pope tried to turn the current of English poetry into this narrow channel, but the sea-force soon had its way with the banks and dykes. Watson has tried to revive that heresy; he has disguised its principles under new terms, but it remains the same heresy. Poetry is even less a criticism of thought than it is a "criticism of life," it must be at all points creation, creation of life, creation of thought, if it is to be in the true sense poetry.

It is to Wordsworth, among many masters, that Mr. Watson tells us that he is most indebted. Wordsworth is not always a safe master, and it is apparently from him that Watson has accepted the main principles of his blank verse. Wordsworth's blank verse was more often bad than good; it was bad on principle, and good by the grace of a not infrequent inspiration. At its best, it is not among the great specimens of blank verse, or not for more than a very few lines at a time. It is without vitality, it is without that freedom in beauty which can come from vitality alone. Watson has learnt from Wordsworth that it is possible to write grave and impressive lines, sweeping up to fine perorations, in which the pauses are measured, not by the vital pulses of the mood, but by a conscious, cultivated method. Some of Wordsworth's blank verse in *The Prelude*, though in

itself tame and inefficient, takes hold of the reader through a personal warmth which makes him almost forget that he is reading verse at all. But we never feel personal warmth in Watson; he succeeds or fails as an artificer, and as an artificer only.

It is probably not too much to say that there is not a cadence in his verse which has not been heard before. By what miracle it is that out of the same number and order of syllables no two cadences of Shakespeare and of Browning, of Keats and of Herrick, of Crashaw and of Blake, can be precisely matched, no man knows or will ever know, least of all the poet himself. He writes what comes to him, and he may work on his writing until hardly a word of the original stuff remains; and with all his care, or in spite of it, the thing turns doggedly into his own manner of speech, and comes to us with a cadence that we have never heard before. He may have read much or little, and it will make barely an appreciable difference. The music that is not learnt in books comes from some unknown source which is as variable as the sea or the wind. Music learnt from books, however much beauty may be breathed into it by the singer, keeps the taint of its source about it. It is by such music that the literary artist, not the artist in literature, is known.

William Watson's *Odes and other Poems* is remarkable for precisely the qualities which have distinguished his work since the time when, in *Wordsworth's Grave*, he first elaborated a manner of his own. That manner has some of the qualities of eighteenth-century verse—its sobriety, its strictness, its intellectual and critical interests; and it also has certain of the richer and more emotional elements of the nineteenth-century revival of the Elizabethan passion, and splendour. The reader is reminded of Gray, of Wordsworth, of Matthew

Arnold, at moments of Keats and of Rossetti. In spite of occasional and unaccountable blemishes, Watson's work is, in the main, the most careful work of any of the younger poets. Nor is it lacking in poetic impulse. It does not seem to us that this impulse is a very strong one, or one of special originality, but it is there, undoubtedly; and Watson's verse, unlike that of most of the people now writing, justifies its existence. Take, for instance, these opening lines from the ode *To Arthur Christopher Benson*:

In that grave shade august
That round your Eton clings,
To you the centuries must
Be visible corporate things,
And the high Past appear
Affably real and near,
For all its grandiose airs, caught from the mien of Kings.

The new age stands as yet
Half built against the sky
Open to every threat
Of storms that clamour by;
Scaffolding veils the walls,
And dim dust floats and falls,
As, moving to and fro, their tasks the masons ply.

But changeless and complete,
Rise unperturbed and vast,
Above our din and heat,
The turrets of the Past,
Mute as that city asleep,
Lulled with enchantments deep,
Far in Arabian dreamland built where all things last.

The grave and equable sweep of this verse, so unlike most of the hot and flurried rhyming of contemporaries, has the excellence of form which gives adequate expression to a really poetic conception. Watson takes a very serious view of things, except in a few attempts at satire or playfulness, which are not quite fortunate either in idea or in execution. He has the laudable desire to enter into competition with the great masters on their own ground. And the result is by no means ludicrous, as it would be with most people. Only it is a little as if the accomplished copyist were to challenge comparison with the picture which he has, after all, copied. Work done in the manner, and under the influence, of previous writers may indeed, under certain circumstances, attain the virtue of originality; but only under certain circumstances. Chatterton, for instance, was original only when he copied, or when he fancied he was copying; Keats was absolutely himself even at the period when his form was entirely imitative. The personality of some men can find no home in the present, can wear no dress of modern fashion; can express itself only by a return to the ways of speech of an earlier age. But this sort of spiritual nostalgia can only become effective when it is a very deep and individual instinct, and not merely a general literary sympathy. Watson has learnt more from his masters than he has brought to them. We have read his latest book with real appreciation of its many admirable qualities, but, on closing it, we have no more definite idea of Watson himself, of what he really is, apart from what he chooses to express, than we had before opening it. And yet the greater part of the book, in one sense, is quite personal. He tells us what he thought of Stevenson's *Catriona*, how he felt in Richmond Park, and of his friendly regard for one or two

estimable men of letters. But the real man, the real point of view, the outlook on life, the deeper human sympathies: what do we learn of these? There is, indeed, one poem, among the finest in the book, in which a touch of more acute personal feeling gives a more intimate thrill to the verse—the poem called *Vita Nuova*, of which we may quote the greater part:

O ancient streams, O far-descended woods
Full of the fluttering of melodious souls;
O hills and valleys that adorn yourselves
In solemn jubilation; winds and clouds,
Ocean and land in stormy nuptials clasped,
And all exuberant creatures that acclaim
The Earth's divine renewal: lo, I too
With yours would mingle somewhat of glad song.
I too have come through wintry terrors—yea,
Through tempest and through cataclysm of soul
Have come, and am delivered. Me the Spring,
Me also, dimly with new life hath touched,
And with regenerate hope, the salt of life;
And I would dedicate these thankful tears
To whatsoever Power beneficent,
Veiled though his countenance, undivulged his thought,
Hath led me from the haunted darkness forth
Into the gracious air and vernal morn,
And suffers me to know my spirit a note
Of this great chorus, one with bird and stream
And voiceful mountain,—nay, a string, how jarred
And all but broken! of that lyre of life
Whereon himself, the master harp-player,
Resolving all its mortal dissonance
To one immortal and most perfect strain,
Harps without pause, building with song the world.

But this poem stands alone in the volume as an expression of very interesting personal feeling, the rest being mainly concerned with personalities.

Like all Watson's volumes of verse, these *Odes and other Poems* contain some excellent literary criticism, conveyed in the neatest and briefest fashion possible. In fact, Watson's verse is only too full of sane and measured criticism—an excellent quality no doubt, but hardly one quite compatible with poetry of a high order. But how fine, how exact, how discriminating, is this piece of criticism, for instance, in verse !—

Forget not, brother singer ! that though Prose
Can never be too truthful or too wise,
Song is not Truth, not Wisdom, but the rose
Upon Truth's lips, the light in Wisdom's eyes.

It was in the epigram that Watson first did finished work, and his most typical work is certainly to be found in forms more or less akin to the epigram ; in the sonnet, for example. There are so many good sonnets in this volume that choice is difficult ; here is one called *Night on Curbar Edge* :

No echo of man's life pursues my ears ;
Nothing disputes this Desolation's reign ;
Change comes not, this dread temple to profane,
Where time by æons reckons, not by years.

Its patient form one crag, sole stranded, rears,
Type of whate'er is destined to remain
While yon still host encamped on night's waste plain
Keeps armed watch, a million quivering spears.

Hushed are the wild and wing'd lives of the moor ;
The sleeping sheep neſtle 'neath ruined wall,
Or unhewn ſtones in random concourse hurled :
Solitude, sleepless, liſtens at Fate's door ;
And there is built and 'ſtablisht over all
Tremendous silence, older than the world.

The breadth of phrasing here is noticeable ; and it is by such qualities as this, as well as by the careful accuracy with which every note is produced, that Watson is diſtinguished alike from older men of the type of Alfred Auſtin, and from younger men of such varying capacities as John Davidson and Yeats. If he has not the making of a great poet, he is already an accomplished poet ; and if he does not possess the higheſt qualities, he possesses several of the secondary qualities in the higheſt degree.

Watson's *Ode on the Day of Coronation of King Edward VII* is a fine piece of verse-writing, and can hardly fail to remind the reader of great poetry. It is conſtruĉted with care, it flows, it has gravity, an air of amplitude, many ſtriking single lines, and its sentiments are unexceptionable. When we read such lines as these :

All these, O King, from their seclusion dread,
And guarded palace of eternity,
Mix in thy pageant with phantasmal tread,
Hear the long waves of acclamation roll,
And with yet mightier silence marshal thee
To the awful throne thou haſt inherited—

we feel that this is at leaſt workmanlike work, written by a man who has ſtudied great maſters, and who takes himself and his art seriously. There is not an undignified line in

the whole poem, nor a break in the slow, deliberate movement. Watson has style, he is never facile or common. He has frequent felicities of phrase, but he subordinates separate effects to the effect of the whole, and he is almost the only living writer of verse of whom this could be said. His ode is excellently made, from every external point of view. Yet, after reading it over and over, with a full recognition of its technical qualities, we are unable to accept it as genuine poetry, as the equal of the thing which it resembles.

Great poetry is not often written for official occasions, but that it can be so written we need only turn to Marvell's *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* to realise. Watson looks instinctively to public events for his inspiration, and there is something in his temper of mind and of style which seems to set him naturally apart as a commentator upon the destinies of nations. He has never put any vital part of himself into his work; he has told us nothing of what he is when he is not a writer. All his utterances have been themselves official, the guarded statement of just so much of his own thoughts and feelings as he cares to betray to the public. His kind is rather critical than creative, and it was by his epigrams that he first attracted attention. His technique is so accomplished that he seems very often to be thinking only of what he is saying, when it is evident, on a closer examination, that he is thinking much more of how he is saying it. For the poet who concerns himself with public events this might seem to be a useful part of his poetic equipment. Court ceremonies demand court dress. Undoubtedly, but the art of the courtier requires him to forget that he is dressed for an occasion, to forget everything but the occasion. Throughout the whole of his Coronation ode Watson never forgets that he is celebrating

an important ceremony. His costume is perfectly adjusted, he wears it with grace and dignity; his elocution, as he delivers his lines, is a model of clearness and discreet emphasis. Everything that he says is perfectly appropriate; good taste can go no further. But the occasion itself, the meaning, the emotion, of the occasion? That does not come into the poem; the poem tells us all about it.

Now look at Marvell's ode, and forget for the moment that it is a masterpiece of poetry. What a passion fires the hard, convincing thought! How the mere logic holds the attention! Every word lives, and the cadences (creating a new form for themselves) do but follow the motions of the writer's bright, controlling energy. It is impossible to read the lines aloud without a feeling of exultation. In Watson's ode there is not a breath of life; what is said—admirable and sensible, and at times poetically conceived, as it is—comes with no impetus from the mind that has conceived it coldly. And it is to be noted that, though thought and expression are fitted together with great skill and precision, the expression is always rather above the pitch of the thought. Take these lines:

O doom of overlordships! to decay
First at the heart, the eye scarce dimmed at all;
Or perish of much cumber and array,
The burdening robe of empire, and its pall;
Or, of voluptuous hours the wanton prey,
Die of the poisons that most sweetly slay;
Or, from insensate height,
With prodigies, with light
Of trailing angers on the monstrous night,
Magnificently fall.

There we find expression strained to a point to which the thought has not attained. In other words, we find rhetoric. Weight and resonance of verse do but drag down and deafen that which they should uplift and sound abroad, when, instead of being attendants upon greatness, they attempt to replace it.

FRANCIS THOMPSON

i

IF Crashaw, Shelley, Donne, Marvell, Patmore, and some other poets had not existed, Francis Thompson would be a poet of remarkable novelty. Not that originality, in the strictest sense, is always essential to the making of a poet. There have been poets who have so absolutely lived in another age, whose whole soul has been so completely absorbed by a fashion of writing, perhaps by a single writer, belonging to an earlier century, that their work has been an actual reincarnation of this particular time or writer. Chatterton, for instance, remains one of the finest of English poets, entirely on account of poems which were so deliberately imitative as to have been passed off as transcripts from old manuscripts. Again, it is possible to be deftly and legitimately eclectic, as was Milton, for example. Milton had, in an extraordinary degree, the gift of assimilating all that he found, all that he borrowed. Often, indeed, he improved his borrowed goods; but always he worked them into the pattern of his own stuff, he made them part of himself; and wisdom is justified of her children. Now Thompson, though he affects certain periods, is not so absorbed in any one as to have found his soul by losing it; nor is he a dainty borrower from all, taking his good things wheresoever he finds them. Rather, he has been impressed by certain styles, in themselves incompatible,

indeed implying the negation of one another—that of Crashaw, for instance, and that of Patmore—and he has deliberately mixed them, against the very nature of things. Thus his work, with all its splendours, has the impress of no individuality; it is a splendour of rags and patches, a very masque of anarchy. A new poet announces himself by his new way of seeing things, his new way of feeling things; Thompson comes to us a cloudy visionary, a rapturous sentimentalist, in whom emotion means coloured words, and sight the opportunity for a bedazzlement.

The opening section of the book *Love in Dian's Lap* is an experiment in Platonic love. The experiment is in itself interesting, though here perhaps a little too deliberate; in its bloodless ecstasy it recalls *Epipsychidion*, which is certainly one of the several models on which it has been formed; it has, too, a finely extravagant courtliness, which belongs to an older school of verse, as here:

Yet I have felt what terrors may consort
In women's cheeks, the Graces' soft resort;
My hand hath shook at gentle hands' access,
And trembled at the waving of a tress;
My blood known panic fear, and fled dismayed,
Where ladies' eyes have set their ambuscade.
The rustle of a robe hath been to me
The very rattle of love's musketry;
Although my heart hath beat the loud advance,
I have recoiled before a challenging glance,
Proved gay alarms where warlike ribbons dance.
And from it all, this knowledge have I got,—
The whole, that others have, is less than they have not;
All which makes other women noted fair,
Unnoted would remain and overshone in her.

Finer, in yet a different style, is the poem *To a Poet Breaking Silence*, of which we may quote the opening lines :

Too wearily had we and song
Been left to look and left to long,
Yea, song and we to long and look,
Since thine acquainted feet forsook
The mountain where the Muses hymn
For Sinai and the Seraphim.
Now in both the mountains' shine
Dress thy countenance, twice divine !
From Moses and the Muses draw
The Tables of thy double Law !
His rod-born fount and Castaly
Let the one rock bring forth for thee,
Renewing so from either spring
The songs that both thy countries sing :
Or we shall fear lest, heavened thus long,
Thou should'st forget thy native song,
And mar thy mortal melodies
With broken stammer of the skies.

Next after these poems of spiritual love come certain odes and lyrical pieces : one *To the Dead Cardinal of Westminster*, modelled, as to form, on Marvell's great ode : *A Judgment in Heaven*, in which we are permitted to see the angels " as they pelted each other with handfuls of stars " —the most clotted and inchoate poem in the volume ; together with *A Corymbus for Autumn* and *The Hound of Heaven*, which are the finest things Thompson has done. Here, with all his extravagance, which passes from the sublime to the ridiculous with all the composure of a mad-

man, Thompson has grappled with splendid subjects splendidly. He can, it is true, say :

Against the red throb of the sunset-heart
I laid my own to beat ;

but he can also say (with a solemn imagery which has its precise meaning as well as its large utterance) :

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds ;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity,
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again ;
But not ere him who summoneth
I first have seen, enwound
With glooming robes purpureal, cypress-crowned ;
His name I know, and what his trumpet saith.

Here, as ever, Thompson indulges in his passion for polysyllables—" the splendent might of thy conflagrate fancies," for example ; but forced words are less out of place in poems which, in the best sense of the word, are rhapsodies, than in poems such as those on children, which fill the last section of the book, and in which one may read of " a silvern segregation, globed complete," of " derelict trinkets of the darling young," and so forth. The last piece of all, *To Monica thought Dying*, is written in downright imitation of Patmore ; but how far is it, in its straining after fine effects of sound, its straining after fine effects of pathos, from the perfect justice of expression which Patmore has found in such poems as *The Toys* and *Poor Child* ! for an equally perfect sentiment of the pathetic ! That a writer who at his best is so fiery and exuberant should ever take

Patmore for a model, should really try to catch even his tricks of expression, is very curious, and shows, as much as any other single characteristic, the somewhat external qualities of Thompson's inspiration. A poet with an individuality to express, seeking for an individual form of expression, could scarcely, one fancies, have been drawn by any natural affinity so far away from himself and his main habitudes. Crashaw and Patmore—we come back to the old antagonism—can a man serve two such masters? Imagine Patmore rewriting, according to his own standard of composition, *The Flaming Heart*, or Crashaw treating in his own way the theme of *Delicæ Sapientiæ de Amore*! Here and there, too, in Thompson's work, are reminiscences of Rossetti; as here:

> *Yea, in that ultimate heart's occult abode*
> *To lie as in an oubliette of God.*

And the influence of Shelley is felt from the first line to the last. Yet, in spite of all this, Thompson has something, unquestionably, of "fine frenzy," not always quite under her own control; he amazes by his audacity, and delights by the violence with which he would fain storm Parnassus. His verse has generally fervour, a certain lyric glow, a certain magnificence; it has abundant fancy, and its measure of swift imagination. But the feast he spreads for us is a very Trimalchio's feast—the heaped profusion, the vaunting prodigality, which brings a surfeit; and, unlike Trimalchio, it could not be said of him *Omnia domi nascuntur.*

Verse, unless it is in some measure ecstasy, cannot be poetry. But it does not follow that in verse the most fervid ecstasy is the best poetry. If, indeed, for "fervid" be substituted "fervidly expressed," it is quite the contrary.

Coventry Patmore has pointed out that the sign of great art is peace, a peace which comes of the serene, angelic triumph over mortal tumults, and those less essential raptures which are after all flames of the earth's centre. Francis Thompson has the ecstasy; but unfortunately he has not realised that ecstasy, if it is to be communicated from the soul to the soul, and not merely from the mouth to the ear, must be whispered, not shouted.

If a man's style is the man—his innermost self, as we may suppose, revealing itself in the very words he uses—Thompson, in a more special sense than almost any other writer, is seen in his language. He is that strange phenomenon, a verbal intelligence. He thinks in words, he receives his emotions and sensations from words, and the rapture which he certainly attains is a rapture of the disembodied word. It is not that his verse is without meaning, that in taking care of the sound he allows the sense (poor orphan !) to take care of itself. He has a meaning, but that meaning, if it has not a purely verbal origin, is at all events allowed to develop under the direct suggestion of the words which present themselves to interpret it. His consciousness is dominated by its own means of expression. And what is most curious of all is that, while Thompson has a quite recognisable manner, he has not achieved a really personal style. He has learnt much, not always with wisdom, and in crowding together Cowley, Crashaw, Donne, Patmore, to name but a few of many, he has not remembered that to begin a poem in the manner of Crashaw, and to end it in the manner of Patmore, is not the same thing as fusing two alien substances into a single new substance. Styles he has, but not style. This very possession by the word has, perhaps, hindered him from attaining it. Fine style, the style

in which every word is perfect, rises beautifully out of a depth into which words have never stretched down their roots. Intellect and emotion are the moulders of style. A profound thought, a profound emotion, speaks as if it were unconscious of words; only when it speaks as if unconscious of words do the supreme words issue from its lips. Ornament may come afterwards; you cannot begin with ornament. Thompson, however, begins with ornament.

Unhappily, too, Thompson's verse is certainly fatiguing to read, and one of the reasons why it is so fatiguing is that the thought that is in it does not progress; it remains stationary. About the fragile life which cries somewhere in its centre he builds up walls of many-coloured bricks, immuring his idea, hiding it, stifling it. How are we to read an ode of many pages in which there is no development, not even movement? Stanza is heaped upon stanza, page is piled upon page, and we end where we began. The writer has said endless things about something, but never the thing itself. Poetry consists in saying the thing itself.

But this is not the only reason why it is fatiguing to read Thompson's verse. To read it is too much like jolting in a springless cart over a ploughed field, about noontide, on a hot summer day. His lines, of which this is typical,—

Pulp the globed weight of juiced Iberia's grape,

are so packed with words that each line detains the reader. Not merely does Thompson prefer the line to the stanza or the paragraph, he prefers the word to the line. He has failed to remember that while two and two make four, four are not necessarily better than two—that because red is brighter than grey, red is not necessarily the better colour to use whenever one wants to use a colour. He hears the

brass in the orchestra sounding out loudly over the strings and he therefore suppresses the strings. He has a bold and prolific fancy, and he pampers his fancy; yet prodigality is not abundance, nor profusion taste. He is without reticence, which he looks upon as stint or as penury. Having invited his guests to his feast, he loads their plates with more than they can eat, forcing it upon them under the impression that to do otherwise is to be lacking in hospitality.

Yet, after all, the feast is there—Trimalchio's if you will, but certainly not a Barmecide's. Thompson has a remarkable talent, he has a singular mastery of verse, as the success of his books is not alone in proving. Never has the seventeenth century phrasing been so exactly repeated as in some of his poems. Never have Patmore's odes been more scrupulously rewritten, cadence for cadence. Thompson's fancy is untiring, if sometimes it tires the reader; he has, not exactly at command, but not beyond reach, an eager imagination. No one can cause a more vaguely ardent feeling in the sympathetic reader, a feeling made up of admiration and of astonishment in perhaps equal portions. There are times when the fire in him burns clear through its enveloping veils of smoke, and he writes passages of real splendour. Why, then, does he for the most part wrap himself so willingly in the smoke?

ii

In Francis Thompson's first volume of poems, I pointed out some of the sources of the so-called originality of all that highly coloured verse—Crashaw, Shelley, Donne, Marvell, Patmore, Rossetti—and I expressed a doubt whether a writer who could allow himself to be so singularly influenced by such singularly different writers could be really, in the

full sense of the term, a new poet. The book before me confirms my doubt. Thompson is careful to inform his readers that " this poem, though new in the sense of being now for the first time printed, was written some four years ago, about the same date as the *Hound of Heaven* in my former volume." Still, as he takes the responsibility of printing it, and of issuing it by itself, it may reasonably be assumed that he has written nothing since which he considers to be of higher quality.

The book consists of one long and obscure rhapsody in two parts. Why it should ever begin, or end, or be thus divided, is not obvious, nor, indeed, is the separate significance of most of the separate pages. It begins in a lilt of this kind :

The leaves dance, the leaves sing,
The leaves dance in the breath of the Spring.
I bid them dance,
I bid them sing,
For the limpid glance
Of my ladyling ;
For the gift to the Spring of a dewier spring,
For God's good grace of this ladyling !

But the rhythm soon becomes graver, the lines charged with a more heavily consonanted burden of sound, as, for instance, in the opening of the second part :

And now, thou elder nursling of the nest,
Ere all the intertangled west
Be one magnificence
Of multitudinous blossoms that o'er-run
The flaming brazen bowl o' the burnished sun
Which they do flower from,
How shall I 'stablish thy *memorial ?*

"I who can scarcely speak my fellows' speech," the writer adds, with more immediate and far-reaching truth than he intends. Thompson wilfully refuses to speak his fellows' speech, in order to speak a polysyllabic speech, made up out of all the periods of the English language—a speech which no one, certainly, has employed in just such a manner before, but which, all the same, does not become really individual. It remains, rather, a patchwork garb, flaming in all the colours, tricked out with barbaric jewels, and, for all its emphatic splendour, suggesting the second-hand dealer's.

In such a poem as *The Hound of Heaven*, in Thompson's former volume, there was a certain substratum of fine meaning, not obscured, or at all events not concealed, by a cloud of stormy words. But here I find no sufficing undercurrent of thought, passion, or reverie, nothing but fine fragments, splendid lines, glowing images. And of such fragments, however brilliant in themselves, no fine poetry can consist. Thompson declares of himself and his verse, with a really fervid sense of his own ardour:

And are its plumes a burning bright array?
They burn for an unincarnated eye.
A bubble, charioteered by the inward breath
Which, ardorous for its own invisible lure,
Urges me glittering to aerial death,
I am rapt towards that bodiless paramour;
Blindly the uncomprehended tyranny
Obeying of my heart's impetuous might.

Scarcely could a single line express more concisely and more significantly the truth about Thompson than one of these lines. "Urges me glittering to aerial death": how true

that is in its confession of that fatal vagueness of aim, showiness of equipment and the toppling disaster of it all! Thompson has miscalculated his strength of flight. He is for ever straining after the heights, and there are moments when he seems to have reached them. But it is only that he has dazzled and confused our sight by the trick of some unfamiliar magic. And his magic, for the most part, is a magic of words. Those suggestions of a rare poetic vision, which, from the first, seemed nebulous rather than illuminated, have become little more than verbal sophistries. To have transposed a phrase until it becomes

To Naiad it through the unfrothing air

satisfies him as though it had been a vision or an invention. The frigid conceit of

The blushes on existence's pale face

satisfies him as though it were an imaginative conception. And such combinations of words as

The very hues
Which their conflagrant elements effuse

satisfy him as being effects of appropriate poetic novelty. The *Poems*, with all their faults, had suggestions of finer possibilities. In *Sister-Songs* none of these possibilities is realised. At the most it is a sort of fantastic world of waters (shall we say, at Thompson's suggestion?) where,

—— like the phantasms of a poet pale,
The exquisite marvels sail:
Clarified silver; greens and azures frail
As if the colours sighed themselves away,

And blent in supersubtile interplay
As if they swooned into each other's arms;
Repured vermilion,
Like ear-tips 'gainst the sun;
And beings that, under night's swart pinion,
Make every wave upon the harbour bars
A beaten yolk of stars.
But where day's glance turns baffled from the deeps,
Die out those lovely swarms;
And in the immense profound no creature glides or creeps.

Francis Thompson's earlier volume of *Poems* attracted perhaps an undue amount of attention on account of its gorgeous and unusual qualities of diction, and a certain exuberant and extravagant fervour of mood. These are not, indeed, the characteristics of the highest kind of poetry, but they are characteristics which impress uncritical persons as being of the essence of poetic inspiration. To express a small thought by a large word is always impressive, and a certain excitement in the manner of it adds greatly to the effect of the performance. Thus, much writing which is merely feverish and blustering becomes admired for the quality of its defects, these defects being taken to be extraordinary merits; while writing which has all the quietness of true perfection passes unobserved or unrecognised. In particular it is forgotten that the expression of a thought should be like a well-fitting suit of clothes, following closely and gracefully the outlines of the body that informs it. Francis Thompson, alike in his former work and in the work which he has just brought out, is never content unless his thought is swathed in fold after fold of variegated drapery, cut after no recognised fashion and arranged on no con-

sistent or indeed comprehensible plan. Take this passage, for instance, on page 3 of *Sister-Songs*:

Now therefore, thou who bring'st the year to birth,
Who guid'st the bare and dabbled feet of May;
Sweet stem to that rose Christ, who from the earth
Suck'st our poor prayers, conveying them to Him;
Be aidant, tender Lady, to my lay!
Of thy two maidens somewhat must I say,
Ere shadows twilight lashes, drooping, dim
Day's dreamy eyes from us;
Ere eve has struck and furled
The beamy-textured tent transpicuous,
Of webbèd coerule wrought and woven calms,
Whence has paced forth the lambent-footed sun.

This is a fair, indeed a favourable, specimen of Thompson's way of "Making familiar things seem strange." His vocabulary is for the most part made up of an ingenious, and really novel, selection from the words that other people are ignorant of, or perhaps avoid if they know them: "battailously," for instance, or "illuminate and volute redundance," which will be found on a single page. He describes himself as a

Wantoner between the yet untreacherous claws
Of newly-whelped existence:

while on another page he tell us:

The hours I tread ooze *memories of thee, sweet!*

He sees "blossoms *mince* it on river swells," and notices when

All the fair
Frequence swayed in irised wavers.

All this is surely a very artificial and unnecessary and inelegant way of expressing very ordinary matters. The

same strain after a sort of exterior heightening of expression appears on every page. Often the language has a certain magnificence, and it is always employed in the service of a luxurious fancy, which not infrequently rises to the point of sheer imagination. But the whole book leaves no enduring impression on the mind, only the visual memory of flooding words, splashing in coloured waves. As a piece of decoration, in this highly coloured kind, it has qualities of extraordinary brilliance and audacity. And at times, becoming for a moment a little simpler than its wont, though still fantastic and freakish, it will present us with an effect like that in the following lines :

And thou, bright girl, not long shalt thou repeat
Idly the music from thy mother caught ;
Not vainly has she wrought,
Not vainly from the cloudward-jetting turret
Of her aerial mind, for thy weak feet,
Let down the silken ladder of her thought.
She bare thee with a double pain,
Of the body and the spirit ;
Thou thy fleshly weeds hast ta'en,
Thy diviner weeds inherit !

The precious streams which through thy young lips roll
Shall leave their lovely delta in thy soul.
Where sprites of so essential kind
Set their paces,
Surely they shall leave behind
The green traces
Of their sportance in the mind ;
And thou shalt, ere we well may know it,
Turn that daintiness, a poet,—
Elfin-ring
Woere sweet fancies foot and sing.

Such work as this comes strangely enough into the midst of contemporary verse, concerned as that for the most part is with other ends, and elaborated after quite another fashion. Always interesting, if never quite satisfying; too crowded, too loaded, rather than, as with most verse, meagre and unfilled; curiously conceived, and still more curiously wrought out; it holds a unique position in the poetic literature of the day, if not, in Patmore's words concerning the earlier volume of *Poems*, "in the prominent ranks of fame, with Cowley and Crashaw." It is a book which no one else could have written, and in which no one can fail to admire, with however many reservations, the "illuminate and volute redundance" of an only too opulent talent.

For it is difficult to avoid the conviction that Thompson deliberately rejects simplicity, and even, at times, with an elaborate and conscious search after long and heavily coloured words. There is in this book a translation of Victor Hugo's *Ce qu'on entend sur la Montagne*, a well-known poem in the *Feuilles d'Automne*. In going carefully over Thompson's version and comparing it word for word with the original, we have found that where Victor Hugo—not a simple writer—is simple, Thompson embroiders upon him, and that where he is not simple, Thompson is always less so. For instance, in the very first couplet we have "let your tread aspirant rise" for *monte*; a few lines below,

One day at least, whereon my thought, enlicensèd to muse,
Had drooped its wing above the beachèd margent of the ooze,

for

—— *un jour qu'en rêve*
Ma pensée abattit son vol sur une grève.

Further on,

The one was of the waters ; a be-radiant hymnal speech !

for

L'une venait des mers ; chant de gloire ! hymne heureux !

And finally,

And I made question of me, to what issues are we here,
Whither should tend the thwarting threads of all this ravelled gear,

in place of

Et je me demandai pourquoi l'on est ici,
Quel peutêtre après tout le but de tout ceci.

What could be more significant than this heaping up of long and extravagant and sometimes feeble words, instead of the direct language of Hugo, who in this poem, though not without a certain rhetoric, says exactly what he wants to say, and when, as in the last two lines quoted, he thinks that an almost bald simplicity will be in place, sets down his thought in terms of an almost bald simplicity? In this translation Thompson has betrayed himself; he has allowed his critics to see him at work, substituting what is roundabout for what is straightforward; what is lengthy for what is brief; what is elaborated for what is simple. Has not a similar process gone on in his own mind—how far consciously one cannot tell—during the writing of his original poems?

iii

The news comes to me on a little black-edged card that Francis Thompson died at dawn on 13 November, 1907. He was a Roman Catholic, and we are asked to pray for his soul. It was a light that death could not put out, a torch

that no wind could blow out in the darkness. From us indeed it is now turned away, and that little corner of the world to which the poet gives light is darkened.

For Francis Thompson was one of the few poets now or lately living in whom there was some trace of that divine essence which we best symbolise by fire. Emptiness he had and extravagances, but he was a poet, and he had made of many influences a form of new beauty. Much of his speech, which has a heaped imagery unique in our time, seems to have learnt its technique from an almost indiscriminate quarrying among old quarries, and is sometimes so closely copied from that which was fantastically precise in Crashaw, Donne, Vaughan, that we wonder why it was not a few centuries ago that someone said :

Life is a coquetry
Of Death, which wearies me,
Too sure
Of the armour ;

A tiring-room where I
Death's divers garments try,
Till fit
Some fashion sit.

No one since that time, when " conceits " could convey poetical substance, has touched so daintily on plain words, giving by the touch some transfiguring novelty. If it was a style learnt, it was a style perfectly acquired, and at times equal to its original.

Words and cadences must have had an intoxication for him, the intoxication of the scholar ; and " cloudy trophies " were continually falling into his hands, and half through

them, in his hurry to seize and brandish them. He swung a rare incense in a censer of gold, under the vault of a chapel where he had hung votive offerings. The incense half obscures the offerings, and the dim figures of the saints painted on the windows. As he bows there in the chapel he seems to himself to be in " reverberant Eden-ways " or higher, at the throne of heaven, borne on " plumes night-tinctured, englobed and cinctured of saints." Passing beyond the world he finds strange shapes, full of pomp and wearing strange crowns ; but they are without outline, and his words disguise, decorate, but do not reveal them.

When he chanted in his chapel of dreams, the airs were often airs which he had learnt from Crashaw and from Patmore. They came to life again when he used them, and he made for himself a music which was part strangely familiar and part his own, almost bewilderingly. Such reed-notes and such orchestration of sound were heard nowhere else ; and people listened to the music, entranced as by a new magic.

When he put these dreams and this music into verse, with a craft which he had perfected for his own use, the poetry was for the most part a splendid rhetoric, imaginative and passionless, as if the moods went by, wrapped in purple, in a great procession. *The Hound of Heaven* has the harmonies of a symphony, and there are delicacies among its splendours, and, among instants of falsely fanciful sentiment, such august moments as this :

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds ;
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity,
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsèd turrets slowly wash again.

It is full of fine and significant symbolism, it is an elaborate pageant of his own life, with all its miseries, heights, relapses, and flight after some eternity; but, as he writes it, it turns intellectual, and the voice is like that of one declaiming his confession. It was not thus that Christina Rossetti let us overhear a few of the deepest secrets of her soul.

The genius of Francis Thompson was oriental, exuberant in colour, woven into elaborate patterns, and went draped in old silken robes, that had survived many dynasties. The spectacle of him was an enchantment; he passed like a wild vagabond of the mind, dazzling our sight. He had no message, but he dropped sentences by the way, cries of joy or pity, love of children, worship of the Virgin and Saints and of those who were patron saints to him on earth; his voice was heard like a wandering music, which no one heeded for what it said, in a strange tongue, but which came troublingly into the mind, bringing it the solace of its old, recaptured melodies. Other poets of his time have had deeper things to say, and a more flawless beauty; others have put more of their hearts into their song; but no one has been a torch waved with so fitful a splendour over the gulfs of our darkness.

II. IMPRESSIONS AND NOTES: FRENCH WRITERS

INTRODUCTION

"*It is in and through Symbols that man, consciously or unconsciously, lives, works, and has his being: those ages, moreover, are accounted the noblest which can the best recognise symbolical worth, and prize it highest.*"—CARLYLE.

WITHOUT symbolism there can be no literature; indeed, not even language. What are words themselves but symbols, almost as arbitrary as the letters which compose them, mere sounds of the voice to which we have agreed to give certain significations, as we have agreed to translate these sounds by those combinations of letters? Symbolism began with the first words uttered by the first man, as he named every living thing; or before them, in heaven, when God named the world into being. And we see, in these beginnings, precisely what Symbolism in literature really is: a form of expression, at the best but approximate, essentially but arbitrary, until it has obtained the force of a convention, for an unseen reality apprehended by the consciousness. It is sometimes permitted to us to hope that our convention is indeed the reflection rather than merely the sign of that unseen reality. We have done much if we have found a recognisable sign.

"A symbol," says Comte Goblet d'Alviella, in his book on *The Migration of Symbols*, "might be defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction."

Originally, as he points out, used by the Greeks to denote "the two halves of the tablet they divided between themselves as a pledge of hospitality," it came to be used of every sign, formula, or rite by which those initiated in any mystery made themselves secretly known to one another. Gradually the word extended its meaning, until it came to denote every conventional representation of idea by form, of the unseen by the visible. "In a Symbol," says Carlyle, "there is concealment and yet revelation: hence therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a double significance." And, in that fine chapter of *Sartor Resartus*, he goes further, vindicating for the word its full value: "In the Symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there."

It is in such a sense as this that the word Symbolism has been used to describe a movement which, during the last generation, has profoundly influenced the course of French literature. All such words, used of anything so living, variable, and irresponsible as literature, are, as symbols themselves must so often be, mere compromises, mere indications. Symbolism, as seen in the writers of our day, would have no value if it were not seen also, under one disguise or another, in every great imaginative writer. What distinguishes the Symbolism of our day from the Symbolism of the past is that it has now become conscious of itself, in a sense in which it was unconscious even in Gérard de Nerval, to whom I trace the particular origin of the literature which I call Symbolist. The forces which mould the thought of men change, or men's resistance to them slackens; with the change of men's thought comes

a change of literature, alike in its inmost essence and in its outward form: after the world has starved its soul long enough in the contemplation and the re-arrangement of material things, comes the turn of the soul; and with it comes the literature of which I write in this volume, a literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality, and the unseen world no longer a dream.

The great epoch in French literature which preceded this epoch was that of the offshoot of Romanticism which produced Baudelaire, Flaubert, the Goncourts, Taine, Zola, Leconte de Lisle. Taine was the philosopher both of what had gone before him and of what came immediately after; so that he seems to explain at once Flaubert and Zola. It was the age of Science, the age of material things; and words, with that facile elasticity which there is in them, did miracles in the exact representation of everything that visibly existed, exactly as it existed. Even Baudelaire, in whom the spirit is always an uneasy guest at the orgy of life, had a certain theory of Realism which tortures many of his poems into strange, metallic shapes, and fills them with imitative odours, and disturbs them with a too deliberate rhetoric of the flesh. Flaubert, the one impeccable novelist who has ever lived, was resolute to be the novelist of a world in which art, formal art, was the only escape form the burden of reality, and in which the soul was of use mainly as the agent of fine literature. The Goncourts caught at Impressionism to render the fugitive aspects of a world which existed only as a thing of flat spaces, and angles, and coloured movement, in which sun and shadow were the artists; as moods, no less flitting, were the artists of the merely receptive consciousnesses of men and women. Zola has tried to build in brick and mortar inside the covers of a book; he

is quite sure that the soul is a nervous fluid, which he is quite sure some man of science is about to catch for us, as a man of science has bottled the air, a pretty, blue liquid. Leconte de Lisle turned the world to stone, but saw, beyond the world, only a pause from misery in a Nirvana never subtilised to the Eastern ecstasy. And, with all these writers, form aimed above all things at being precise, at saying rather than suggesting, at saying what they had to say so completely that nothing remained over, which it might be the business of the reader to divine. And so they have expressed, finally, a certain aspect of the world; and some of them have carried style to a point beyond which the style that says, rather than suggests, cannot go. The whole of that movement comes to a splendid funeral in Heredia's sonnets, in which the literature of form says its last word, and dies.

Meanwhile, something which is vaguely called Decadence had come into being. That name, rarely used with any precise meaning, was usually either hurled as a reproach or hurled back as a defiance. It pleased some young men in various countries to call themselves Decadents, with all the thrill of unsatisfied virtue masquerading as uncomprehended vice. As a matter of fact, the term is in its place only when applied to style; to that ingenious deformation of the language, in Mallarmé, for instance, which can be compared with what we are accustomed to call the Greek and Latin of the Decadence. No doubt perversity of form and perversity of matter are often found together, and, among the lesser men especially, experiment was carried far, not only in the direction of style. But a movement which in this sense might be called Decadent could but have been a straying aside from the main road of literature. Nothing,

not even conventional virtue, is so provincial as conventional vice; and the desire to "bewilder the middle-classes" is itself middle-class. The interlude, half a mock-interlude, of Decadence, diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation. That something more serious has crystallised, for the time, under the form of Symbolism, in which art returns to the one pathway, leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty.

In most of the writers whom I have dealt with as summing up in themselves all that is best in Symbolism, it will be noticed that the form is very carefully elaborated, and seems to count for at least as much as in those writers of whose over-possession by form I have complained. Here, however, all this elaboration comes from a very different motive, and leads to other ends. There is such a thing as perfecting form that form may be annihilated. All the art of Verlaine is in bringing verse to a bird's song, the art of Mallarmé in bringing verse to the song of an orchestra. In Villiers de l'Isle-Adam drama becomes an embodiment of spiritual forces, in Maeterlinck not even their embodiment, but the remote sound of their voices. It is all an attempt to spiritualise literature, to evade the old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority. Description is banished that beautiful things may be evoked, magically; the regular beat of verse is broken in order that words may fly, upon subtler wings. Mystery is no longer feared, as the great mystery in whose midst we are islanded was feared by those to whom that unknown sea was only a great void. We are coming closer to nature, as we seem to shrink from it with something of horror, disdaining to catalogue the trees of the forest. And as we brush aside the accidents of daily life, in which men and women imagine that they are alone touching reality,

we come closer to humanity, to everything in humanity that may have begun before the world and may outlast it.

Here, then, in this revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition; in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul, of whatever exists and can be realised by the consciousness; in this dutiful waiting upon every symbol by which the soul of things can be made visible; literature, bowed down by so many burdens, may at last attain liberty, and its authentic speech. In attaining this liberty, it accepts a heavier burden; for in speaking to us so intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us, it becomes itself a kind of religion, with all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual.

GÉRARD DE NERVAL

i

THIS is the problem of one who lost the whole world and gained his own soul.

"I like to arrange my life as if it were a novel," wrote Gérard de Nerval, and, indeed, it is somewhat difficult to disentangle the precise facts of an existence which was never quite conscious where began and where ended that "overflowing of dreams into real life," of which he speaks. "I do not ask of God," he said, "that he should change anything in events themselves, but that he should change me in regard to things, so that I might have the power to create my own universe about me, to govern my dreams, instead of enduring them." The prayer was not granted, in its entirety; and the tragedy of his life lay in the vain endeavour to hold back the irresistible empire of the unseen, which it was the joy of his life to summon about him. Briefly, we know that Gérard Labrunie (the name de Nerval was taken from a little piece of property, worth some 1,500 francs, which he liked to imagine had always been in the possession of his family) was born at Paris, May 22, 1808. His father was surgeon-major; his mother died before he was old enough to remember her, following the *Grande Armée* on the Russian campaign; and Gérard was brought up, largely under the care of a studious and erratic

uncle, in a little village called Montagny, near Ermenonville. He was a precocious schoolboy, and by the age of eighteen had published six little collections of verses. It was during one of his holidays that he saw, for the first and last time, the young girl whom he calls Adrienne, and whom, under many names, he loved to the end of his life. One evening she had come from the château to dance with the young peasant girls on the grass. She had danced with Gérard, he had kissed her cheek, he had crowned her hair with laurels, he had heard her sing an old song telling of the sorrows of a princess whom her father had shut in a tower because she had loved. To Gérard it seemed that already he remembered her, and certainly he was never to forget her. Afterwards, he heard that Adrienne had taken the veil; then, that she was dead. To one who had realised that it is "we, the living, who walk in a world of phantoms," death could not exclude hope; and when, many years later, he fell seriously and fantastically in love with a little actress called Jenny Colon, it was because he seemed to have found, in that blonde and very human person, the re-incarnation of the blonde Adrienne.

Meanwhile Gérard was living in Paris, among his friends the Romantics, writing and living in an equally desultory fashion. *Le bon Gérard* was the best loved, and, in his time, not the least famous, of the company. He led, by choice, now in Paris, now across Europe, the life of a vagabond, and more persistently than others of his friends who were driven to it by need. At that time, when it was the aim of everyone to be as eccentric as possible, the eccentricities of Gérard's life and thought seemed, on the whole, less noticeable than those of many really quite normal persons. But with Gérard there was no pose; and when, one day, he

was found in the Palais-Royal, leading a lobster at the end of a blue ribbon (because, he said, it does not bark, and knows the secrets of the sea), the visionary had simply lost control of his visions, and had to be sent to Dr. Blanche's asylum at Montmartre. He entered March 21, 1841, and came out, apparently well again, on the 21st of November. It would seem that this first access of madness was, to some extent, the consequence of the final rupture with Jenny Colon; on June 5, 1842, she died, and it was partly in order to put as many leagues of the earth as possible between him and that memory that Gérard set out, at the end of 1842, for the East. It was also in order to prove to the world, by his consciousness of external things, that he had recovered his reason. While he was in Syria, he once more fell in love with a new incarnation of Adrienne, a young Druse, Saléma, the daughter of a Sheikh of Lebanon; and it seems to have been almost by accident that he did not marry her. He returned to Paris at the end of 1843 or the beginning of 1844, and for the next few years he lived mostly in Paris, writing charming, graceful, remarkably sane articles and books, and wandering about the streets, by day and night, in a perpetual dream, from which, now and again, he was somewhat rudely awakened. When, in the spring of 1853, he went to see Heine, for whom he was doing an admirable prose translation of his poems, and told him he had come to return the money he had received in advance, because the times were accomplished, and the end of the world, announced by the Apocalypse, was at hand, Heine sent for a cab, and Gérard found himself at Dr. Dubois' asylum, where he remained two months. It was on coming out of the asylum that he wrote *Sylvie*, a delightful idyl, chiefly autobiographical, one of his three actual achievements.

On August 27, 1853, he had to be taken to Dr. Blanche's asylum at Passy, where he remained till May 27, 1854. Thither, after a month or two spent in Germany, he returned on August 8, and on October 19 he came out for the last time, manifestly uncured. He was now engaged on the narrative of his own madness, and the first part of *Le Rêve et la Vie* appeared in the *Revue de Paris* of January 1, 1855. On the 20th he came into the office of the review, and showed Gautier and Maxime du Camp an apron-string which he was carrying in his pocket. "It is the girdle," he said, "that Madame de Maintenon wore when she had *Esther* performed at Saint-Cyr." On the 24th he wrote to a friend: "Come and prove my identity at the police-station of the Châtelet." The night before he had been working at his manuscript in a pot-house of Les Halles, and had been arrested as a vagabond. He was used to such little misadventures, but he complained of the difficulty of writing. "I set off after an idea," he said, "and lose myself; I am hours in finding my way back. Do you know I can scarcely write twenty lines a day, the darkness comes about me so close!" He took out the apron-string. "It is the garter of the Queen of Sheba," he said. The snow was freezing on the ground, and on the night of the 25th, at three in the morning, the landlord of a "penny doss" in the Rue de la Vieille-Lanterne, a filthy alley lying between the quays and the Rue de Rivoli, heard some one knocking at the door, but did not open, on account of the cold. At dawn, the body of Gérard de Nerval was found hanging by the apron-string to a bar of the window.

It is not necessary to exaggerate the importance of the half-dozen volumes which make up the works of Gérard de Nerval. He was not a great writer; he had moments

of greatness ; and it is the particular quality of these moments which is of interest for us. There is the entertaining, but not more than entertaining, *Voyage en Orient* ; there is the estimable translation of *Faust*, and the admirable versions from Heine ; there are the volumes of short stories and sketches, of which even *Les Illuminés*, in spite of the promise of its title, is little more than an agreeable compilation. But there remain three compositions : the sonnets, *Le Rêve et la Vie*, and *Sylvie* ; of which *Sylvie* is the most objectively achieved, a wandering idyl, full of pastoral delight, and containing some folk-songs of Valois, two of which have been translated by Rossetti ; *Le Rêve et la Vie* being the most intensely personal, a narrative of madness, unique as madness itself ; and the sonnets, a kind of miracle, which may be held to have created something at least of the method of the later Symbolists. These three compositions, in which alone Gérard is his finest self, all belong to the periods when he was, in the eyes of the world, actually mad. The sonnets belong to two of these periods, *Le Rêve et la Vie* to the last ; *Sylvie* was written in the short interval between the two attacks in the early part of 1853. We have thus the case of a writer, graceful and elegant when he is sane, but only inspired, only really wise, passionate, collected, only really master of himself, when he is insane. It may be worth looking at a few of the points which so suggestive a problem presents to us.

ii

Gérard de Nerval lived the transfigured inner life of the dreamer. "I was very tired of life!" he says. And like so many dreamers, who have all the luminous darkness of the universe in their brains, he found his most precious and

uninterrupted solitude in the crowded and more sordid streets of great cities. He who had loved the Queen of Sheba, and seen the seven Elohims dividing the world, could find nothing more tolerable in mortal conditions, when he was truly aware of them, than the company of the meanest of mankind, in whom poverty and vice, and the hard pressure of civilisation, still leave some of the original vivacity of the human comedy. The real world seeming to be always so far from him, and a sort of terror of the gulfs holding him, in spite of himself, to its flying skirts, he found something at all events realisable, concrete, in these drinkers of Les Halles, these vagabonds of the Place du Carrousel, among whom he so often sought refuge. It was literally, in part, a refuge. During the day he could sleep, but night wakened him, and that restlessness, which the night draws out in those who are really under lunar influences, set his feet wandering, if only in order that his mind might wander the less. The sun, as he mentions, never appears in dreams; but, with the approach of night, is not everyone a little readier to believe in the mystery lurking behind the world?

Crains, dans le mur aveugle, un regard qui t'épie!

he writes in one of his great sonnets; and that fear of the invisible watchfulness of nature was never absent from him. It is one of the terrors of human existence that we may be led at once to seek and to shun solitude; unable to bear the mortal pressure of its embrace, unable to endure the nostalgia of its absence. "I think man's happiest when he forgets himself," says an Elizabethan dramatist; and, with Gérard, there was Adrienne to forget, and Jenny Colon the actress, and the Queen of Sheba. But to have drunk of

the cup of dreams is to have drunk of the cup of eternal memory. The past, and, as it seemed to him, the future were continually with him ; only the present fled continually from under his feet. It was only by the effort of this contact with people who lived so sincerely in the day, the minute, that he could find even a temporary foothold. With them, at least, he could hold back all the stars, and the darkness beyond them, and the interminable approach and disappearance of all the ages, if only for the space between tavern and tavern, where he could open his eyes on so frank an abandonment to the common drunkenness of most people in this world, here for once really living the symbolic intoxication of their ignorance.

Like so many dreamers of illimitable dreams, it was the fate of Gérard to incarnate his ideal in the person of an actress. The fatal transfiguration of the footlights, in which reality and the artificial change places with so fantastic a regularity, has drawn many moths into its flame, and will draw more, as long as men persist in demanding illusion of what is real, and reality in what is illusion. The Jenny Colons of the world are very simple, very real, if one will but refrain from assuming them to be a mystery. But it is the penalty of all imaginative lovers to create for themselves the veil which hides from them the features of the beloved. It is their privilege, for it is incomparably more entrancing to fancy oneself in love with Isis than to know that one is in love with Manon Lescaut. The picture of Gérard, after many hesitations, revealing to the astonished Jenny that she is the incarnation of another, the shadow of a dream, that she has been Adrienne and is about to be the Queen of Sheba ; her very human little cry of pure incomprehension, *Mais vous ne m'aimez pas !* and her prompt

refuge in the arms of the *jeune premier ridé*, if it were not of the acutest pathos, would certainly be of the most quintessential comedy. For Gérard, so sharp an awakening was but like the passage from one state to another, across that little bridge of one step which lies between heaven and hell, to which he was so used in his dreams. It gave permanency to the trivial, crystallising it, in another than Stendhal's sense; and when death came, changing mere human memory into the terms of eternity, the darkness of the spiritual world was lit with a new star, which was henceforth the wandering, desolate guide of so many visions. The tragic figure of Aurélia, which comes and goes through all the labyrinths of dream, is now seen always "as if lit up by a lightning-flash, pale and dying, hurried away by dark horsemen."

The dream or doctrine of the re-incarnation of souls, which has given so much consolation to so many questioners of eternity, was for Gérard (need we doubt?) a dream rather than a doctrine, but one of those dreams which are nearer to a man than his breath. "This vague and hopeless love," he writes in *Sylvie*, "inspired by an actress, which night by night took hold of me at the hour of the performance, leaving me only at the hour of sleep, had its germ in the recollection of Adrienne, flower of the night, unfolding under the pale rays of the moon, rosy and blonde phantom, gliding over the green grass, half bathed in white mist. . . . To love a nun under the form of an actress! . . . and if it were the very same! It is enough to drive one mad!" Yes, *il y a de quoi devenir fou*, as Gérard had found; but there was also, in this intimate sense of the unity, perpetuity, and harmoniously recurring rhythm of nature, not a little of the inner substance of wisdom. It was a dream, perhaps

refracted from some broken, illuminating angle by which madness catches unseen light, that revealed to him the meaning of his own superstition, fatality, malady: "During my sleep, I had a marvellous vision. It seemed to me that the goddess appeared before me, saying to me: 'I am the same as Mary, the same as thy mother, the same also whom, under all forms, thou hast always loved. At each of thine ordeals I have dropt yet one more of the masks with which I veil my countenance, and soon thou shalt see me as I am!" And in perhaps his finest sonnet, the mysterious *Artémis*, we have, under other symbols, and with the deliberate inconsequence of these sonnets, the comfort and despair of the same faith.

La Treizième revient . . . C'est encor la première;
Et c'est toujours la seule,—ou c'est le seul moment:
Car es-tu reine, ô toi! la première ou dernière?
Es-tu roi, toi le seul ou le dernier amant? . . .

Aimez qui vous aima du berceau dans la bière;
Celle que j'aimai seul m'aime encor tendrement;
C'est la mort—ou la morte . . . Ô délice! ô tourment!
La Rose qu'elle tient, c'est la Rose trémière.

Sainte napolitaine aux mains pleines de feux,
Rose au cœur violet, fleur de sainte Gudule:
As-tu trouvé ta croix dans le désert des cieux?

Roses blanches, tombez! vous insultez nos dieux:
Tombez, fantômes blancs, de votre ciel qui brûle:
—La Sainte de l'abîme est plus sainte à mes yeux!

Who has not often meditated, above all what artist, on the slightness, after all, of the link which holds our faculties together in that sober health of the brain which we call reason? Are there not moments when that link seems to be worn down to so fine a tenuity that the wing of a passing dream might suffice to snap it! The consciousness seems, as it were, to expand and contract at once, into something too wide for the universe, and too narrow for the thought of self to find room within it. Is it that the sense of identity is about to evaporate, annihilating all, or is it that a more profound identity, the identity of the whole sentient universe, has been at last realised? Leaving the concrete world on these brief voyages, the fear is that we may not have strength to return, or that we may lose the way back. Every artist lives a double life, in which he is for the most part conscious of the illusions of the imagination. He is conscious also of the illusions of the nerves, which he shares with every man of imaginative mind. Nights of insomnia, days of anxious waiting, the sudden shock of an event, any one of these common disturbances may be enough to jangle the tuneless bells of one's nerves. The artist can distinguish these causes of certain of his moods from those other causes which come to him because he is an artist, and are properly concerned with that invention which is his own function. Yet is there not some danger that he may come to confuse one with the other, that he may "lose the thread" which conducts him through the intricacies of the inner world?

The supreme artist, certainly, is the furthest of all men from this danger; for he is the supreme intelligence. Like Dante, he can pass through hell unsinged. With him imagination is vision; when he looks into the darkness, he sees. The vague dreamer, the insecure artist and the un-

certain mystic at once, sees only shadows, not recognising their outlines. He is mastered by the images which have come at his call; he has not the power which chains them for his slaves. "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence," and the dreamer who has gone tremblingly into the darkness is in peril at the hands of those very real phantoms who are the reflection of his fear.

The madness of Gérard de Nerval, whatever physiological reasons may be rightly given for its outbreak, subsidence, and return, I take to have been essentially due to the weakness and not the excess of his visionary quality, to the insufficiency of his imaginative energy, and to his lack of spiritual discipline. He was an unsystematic mystic; his "Tower of Babel in two hundred volumes," that medley of books of religion, science, astrology, history, travel, which he thought would have rejoiced the heart of Pico della Mirandola, of Meursius, or of Nicholas of Cusa, was truly, as he says, "enough to drive a wise man mad." "Why not also," he adds, "enough to make a madman wise?" But precisely because it was this *amas bizarre*, this jumble of the perilous secrets in which wisdom is so often folly, and folly so often wisdom. He speaks vaguely of the Kabbala; the Kabbala would have been safety to him, as the Catholic Church would have been, or any other reasoned scheme of things. Wavering among intuitions, ignorances, half-truths, shadows of falsehood, now audacious, now hesitating, he was blown hither and thither by conflicting winds, a prey to the indefinite.

Le Rêve et la Vie, the last fragments of which were found in his pockets after his suicide, scrawled on scraps of paper, interrupted with Kabbalistic signs and "a demonstration of the Immaculate Conception by geometry," is a narrative of a madman's visions by the madman himself, yet showing,

as Gautier says, "cold reason seated by the bedside of hot fever, hallucination analysing itself by a supreme philosophic effort." What is curious, yet after all natural, is that part of the narrative seems to be contemporaneous with what it describes, and part subsequent to it; so that it is not as when De Quincey says to us, such or such was the opium-dream that I had on such a night; but as if the opium-dreamer had begun to write down his dream while he was yet within its coils. "The descent into hell," he calls it twice; yet does he not also write: "At times I imagined that my force and my activity were doubled; it seemed to me that I knew everything, understood everything; and imagination brought me infinite pleasures. Now that I have recovered what men call reason, must I not regret having lost them?" But he had not lost them; he was still in that state of double consciousness which he describes in one of his visions, when, seeing people dressed in white, "I was astonished," he says, "to see them all dressed in white; yet it seemed to me that this was an optical illusion." His cosmical visions are at times so magnificent that he seems to be creating myths; and it is with a worthy ingenuity that he plays the part he imagines to be assigned to him in his astral influences.

"First of all I imagined that the persons collected in the garden (of the madhouse) all had some influence on the stars, and that the one who always walked round and round in a circle regulated the course of the sun. An old man, who was brought there at certain hours of the day, and who made knots as he consulted his watch, seemed to me to be charged with the notation of the course of the hours. I attributed to myself an influence over the course of the moon, and I believed that this star had been struck by the

thunderbolt of the Most High, which had traced on its face the imprint of the mask which I had observed.

"I attributed a mystical signification to the conversations of the warders and of my companions. It seemed to me that they were the representatives of all the races of the earth, and that we had undertaken between us to rearrange the course of the stars, and to give a wider development to the system. An error, in my opinion, had crept into the general combination of numbers, and thence came all the ills of humanity. I believed also that the celestial spirits had taken human forms, and assisted at this general congress, seeming though they did to be concerned with but ordinary occupations. My own part seemed to me to be the re-establishment of universal harmony by Kabbalistic art, and I had to seek a solution by evoking the occult forces of various religions."

So far we have, no doubt, the confusions of madness, in which what may indeed be the symbol is taken for the thing itself. But now observe what follows :

"I seemed to myself a hero living under the very eyes of the gods ; everything in nature assumed new aspects, and secret voices came to me from the plants, the trees, animals, the meanest insects, to warn and to encourage me. The words of my companions had mysterious messages, the sense of which I alone understood ; things without form and without life lent themselves to the designs of my mind ; out of combinations of stones, the figures of angles, crevices, or openings, the shape of leaves, out of colours, odours, and sounds, I saw unknown harmonies come forth. 'How is it,' I said to myself, 'that I can possibly have lived so long outside nature, without identifying myself with her ! All things live, all things are in motion, all things correspond ;

the magnetic rays emanating from myself or others traverse without obstacle the infinite chain of created things: a transparent network covers the world, whose loose threads communicate more and more closely with the planets and the stars. Now a captive upon the earth, I hold converse with the starry choir, which is feelingly a part of my joys and sorrows.' "

To have thus realised that central secret of the mystics, from Pythagoras onwards, the secret which the Smaragdine Tablet of Hermes betrays in its "As things are below, so are they above"; which Boehme has classed in his teaching of "signatures," and Swedenborg has systematised in his doctrine of "correspondences"; does it matter very much that he arrived at it by way of the obscure and fatal initiation of madness? Truth, and especially that soul of truth which is poetry, may be reached by many roads; and a road is not necessarily misleading because it is dangerous or forbidden. Here is one who has gazed at light till it has blinded him; and for us all that is important is that he has seen something, not that his eyesight has been too weak to endure the pressure of light overflowing the world from beyond the world.

iii

And here we arrive at the fundamental principle which is at once the substance and the æsthetics of the sonnets "composed," as he explains, "in that state of meditation which the Germans would call 'supernaturalistic.'" In one, which I will quote, he is explicit, and seems to state a doctrine.

VERS DORÉS

Homme, libre penseur ! te crois-tu seul pensant
Dans ce monde où la vie éclate en toute chose ?
Des forces que tu tiens ta liberté dispose,
Mais de tous tes conseils l'univers est absent.

Respecte dans la bête un esprit agissant :
Chaque fleur est une âme à la Nature éclose ;
Un mystère d'amour dans le métal repose ;
" Tout est sensible ! " Et tout sur ton être est puissant.

Crains, dans le mur aveugle, un regard qui t'épie !
A la matière même un verbe est attaché . . .
Ne la fais pas servir à quelque usage impie !

Souvent dans l'être obscur habite un Dieu caché ;
Et comme un œil naissant couvert par ses paupières,
Un pur esprit s'accroît sous l'écorce des pierres !

But in the other sonnets, in *Artémis*, which I have quoted, in *El Desdichado*, *Myrtho*, and the rest, he would seem to be deliberately obscure; or at least, his obscurity results, to some extent, from the state of mind which he describes in *Le Rêve et la Vie*: " I then saw, vaguely drifting into form plastic images of antiquity, which outlined themselves, became definite, and seemed to represent symbols, of which I only seized the idea with difficulty." Nothing could more precisely represent the impression made by these sonnets, in which, for the first time in French, words are used as the ingredients of an evocation, as themselves not merely colour and sound, but symbol. Here are words which create an

atmosphere by the actual suggestive quality of their syllables, as, according to the theory of Mallarmé, they should do; as, in the recent attempts of the Symbolists, writer after writer has endeavoured to lure them into doing. Persuaded, as Gérard was, of the sensitive unity of all nature, he was able to trace resemblances where others saw only divergences; and the setting together of unfamiliar and apparently alien things, which comes so strangely upon us in his verse, was perhaps an actual sight of what it is our misfortune not to see. His genius, to which madness had come as the liberating, the precipitating, spirit, disengaging its finer essence, consisted in a power of materialising vision, whatever is most volatile and unseizable in vision, and without losing the sense of mystery, or that quality which gives its charm to the intangible. Madness, then, in him, had lit up, as if by lightning-flashes, the hidden links of distant and divergent things; perhaps in somewhat the same manner as that in which a similarly new, startling, perhaps overtrue sight of things is gained by the artificial stimulation of haschisch, opium, and those other drugs by which vision is produced deliberately, and the soul, sitting safe within the perilous circle of its own magic, looks out on the panorama which either rises out of the darkness before it, or drifts from itself into the darkness. The very imagery of these sonnets is the imagery which is known to all dreamers of bought dreams. *Rose au cœur violet, fleur de sainte Gudule; le Temple au péristyle immense; la grotte où nage la syrène*: the dreamer of bought dreams has seen them all. But no one before Gérard realised that such things as these might be the basis of almost new æsthetics. Did he himself realise all that he had done, or was it left for Mallarmé to theorise upon what Gérard had but divined?

That he made the discovery, there is no doubt; and we owe to the fortunate accident of madness one of the foundations of what may be called the practical æsthetics of Symbolism. Look again at that sonnet *Artémis*, and you will see in it not only the method of Mallarmé, but much of the most intimate manner of Verlaine. The first four lines, with their fluid rhythm, their repetitions and echoes, their delicate evasions, might have been written by Verlaine; in the later part the firmness of the rhythms and the jewelled significance of the words are like Mallarmé at his finest, so that in a single sonnet we may fairly claim to see a foreshadowing of the styles of Mallarmé and Verlaine at once. With Verlaine the resemblance goes, perhaps, no further; with Mallarmé it goes to the very roots, the whole man being, certainly, his style.

Gérard de Nerval, then, had divined, before all the world, that poetry should be a miracle; not a hymn to beauty, nor the description of beauty, nor beauty's mirror; but beauty itself, the colour, fragrance, and form of the imagined flower, as it blossoms again out of the page. Vision, the over-powering vision, had come to him beyond, if not against, his will; and he knew that vision is the root out of which the flower must grow. Vision had taught him symbol, and he knew that it is by symbol alone that the flower can take visible form. He knew that the whole mystery of beauty can never be comprehended by the crowd, and that while clearness is a virtue of style, perfect explicitness is not a necessary virtue. So it was with disdain, as well as with confidence, that he allowed these sonnets to be overheard. It was enough for him to say:

J'ai rêvé dans la grotte où nage la syrène;

and to speak, it might be, the siren's language, remembering her. "It will be my last madness," he wrote, "to believe myself a poet: let criticism cure me of it." Criticism, in his own day, even Gautier's criticism, could but be disconcerted by a novelty so unexampled. It is only now that the best critics in France are beginning to realise how great in themselves, and how great in their influence, are these sonnets, which, forgotten by the world for nearly fifty years, have all the while been secretly bringing new æsthetics into French poetry.

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

A chacun son infini

i

COUNT PHILIPPE AUGUSTE MATHIAS DE VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM was born at St. Brieuc, in Brittany, November 28, 1838; he died at Paris, under the care of the Frères Saint-Jean-de-Dieu, August 19, 1889. Even before his death, his life had become a legend, and the legend is even now not to be disentangled from the actual occurrences of an existence so heroically visionary. The Don Quixote of idealism, it was not only in philosophical terms that life, to him, was the dream, and the spiritual world the reality; he lived his faith, enduring what others called reality with contempt, whenever, for a moment, he became conscious of it. The basis of the character of Villiers was pride, and it was a pride which covered more than the universe. And this pride, first of all, was the pride of race.

Descendant of the original Rodolphe le Bel, Seigneur de Villiers (1067), through Jean de Villiers and Maria de l'Isle and their son Pierre the first Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, a Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, born in 1384, had been Marshal of France under Jean-sans-Peur, Duke of Burgundy; he took Paris during the civil war, and after being imprisoned in the Bastille, reconquered Pontoise from the English, and helped

to reconquer Paris. Another Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, born in 1464, Grand Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, defended Rhodes against 200,000 Turks for a whole year, in one of the most famous sieges in history; it was he who obtained from Charles V. the concession of the isle of Malta for his Order, henceforth the Order of the Knights of Malta.

For Villiers, to whom time, after all, was but a metaphysical abstraction, the age of the Crusaders had not passed. From a descendant of the Grand Master of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, the nineteenth century demanded precisely the virtues which the sixteenth century had demanded of that ancestor. And these virtues were all summed up in one word, which, in its double significance, single to him, covered the whole attitude of life: the word "nobility." No word returns oftener to the lips in speaking of what is most characteristic in his work, and to Villiers moral and spiritual nobility seemed but the inevitable consequence of that other kind of nobility by which he seemed to himself still a Knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. It was his birthright.

To the aristocratic conception of things, nobility of soul is indeed a birthright, and the pride with which this gift of nature is accepted is a pride of exactly the opposite kind to that democratic pride to which nobility of soul is a conquest, valuable in proportion to its difficulty. This duality, always essentially aristocratic and democratic, typically Eastern and Western also, finds its place in every theory of religion, philosophy, and the ideal life. The pride of *being*, the pride of *becoming*: these are the two ultimate contradictions set before every idealist. Villiers' choice, inevitable indeed, was significant. In its measure, it must always be the choice

of the artist, to whom, in his contemplation of life, the means is often so much more important than the end. That nobility of soul which comes without effort, which comes only with an unrelaxed diligence over oneself, that I should be I: there can at least be no comparison of its beauty with the stained and dusty onslaught on a never quite conquered fort of the enemy, in a divided self. And, if it be permitted to choose among degrees of sanctity, that, surely, is the highest in which a natural genius for such things accepts its own attainment with the simplicity of a birthright.

And the Catholicism of Villiers was also a part of his inheritance. His ancestors had fought for the Church, and Catholicism was still a pompous flag, under which it was possible to fight on behalf of the spirit, against that materialism which is always, in one way or another, atheist. Thus he dedicates one of his stories to the Pope, chooses ecclesiastical splendours by preference among the many splendours of the world which go to make up his stage-pictures, and is learned in the subtleties of the Fathers. The Church is his favourite symbol of austere intellectual beauty; one way, certainly, by which the temptations of external matter may be vanquished, and a way, also, by which the desire of worship may be satisfied.

But there was also, in his attitude towards the mysteries of the spiritual world, that "forbidden" curiosity which had troubled the obedience of the Templars, and which came to him, too, as a kind of knightly quality. Whether or not he was actually a Kabbalist, questions of magic began, at an early age, to preoccupy him, and, from the first wild experiment of *Isis* to the deliberate summing up of *Axël*, the "occult" world finds its way into most of his pages.

Fundamentally, the belief of Villiers is the belief common

to all Eastern mystics.[1] "Know, once for all, that there is for thee no other universe than that conception thereof which is reflected at the bottom of thy thoughts." "What is knowledge but a recognition?" Therefore, "forgetting for ever that which was the illusion of thyself," hasten to become "an intelligence freed from the bonds and the desires of the present moment." "Become the flower of thyself! Thou art but what thou thinkest: therefore think thyself eternal." "Man, if thou cease to limit in thyself a thing, that is, to desire it, if, so doing, thou withdraw thyself from it, it will follow thee, woman-like, as the water fills the place that is offered to it in the hollow of the hand. For thou possessest the real being of all things, in thy pure will, and thou art the God that thou art able to become."

To have accepted the doctrine which thus finds expression in *Axël*, is to have accepted this among others of its consequences: "Science states, but does not explain: she is the oldest offspring of the chimeras; all the chimeras, then, on the same terms as the world (the oldest of them!) are *something more* than nothing!" And in *Elën* there is a fragment of conversation between two young students, which has its significance also:

"*Goetze.* There's my philosopher in full flight to the regions of the sublime! Happily we have Science, which is a torch, dear mystic; we will analyse your sun, if the planet does not burst into pieces sooner than it has any right to!

Samuel. Science will not suffice. Sooner or later you will end by coming to your knees.

Goetze. Before what?

Samuel. Before the darkness!"

[1] "I am far from sure," wrote Verlaine, "that the philosophy of Villiers will not one day become the formula of our century."

Such avowals of ignorance are possible only from the height of a great intellectual pride. Villiers' revolt against Science, so far as Science is materialistic, and his passionate curiosity in that chimera's flight towards the invisible, are one and the same impulse of a mind to which only mind is interesting. *Toute cette vieille Extériorité, maligne, compliquée, inflexible*, that illusion which Science accepts for the one reality: it must be the whole effort of one's consciousness to escape from its entanglements, to dominate it, or to ignore it, and one's art must be the building of an ideal world beyond its access, from which one may indeed sally out, now and again, in a desperate enough attack upon the illusions in the midst of which men live.

And just that, we find, makes up the work of Villiers, work which divides itself roughly into two divisions: one, the ideal world, or the ideal in the world (*Axël*, *Elën*, *Morgane*, *Isis*, some of the *contes*, and, intermediary, *La Révolte*); the other, satire, the mockery of reality (*L'Eve Future*, the *Contes Cruels*, *Tribulat Bonhomet*). It is part of the originality of Villiers that the two divisions constantly flow into one another; the idealist being never more the idealist than in his buffooneries.

ii

Axël is the Symbolist drama, in all its uncompromising conflict with the "modesty" of Nature and the limitations of the stage. It is the drama of the soul, and at the same time it is the most pictorial of dramas; I should define its manner as a kind of spiritual romanticism. The earlier dramas, *Elën*, *Morgane*, are fixed at somewhat the same point in space; *La Révolte*, which seems to anticipate *The Doll's House*, shows us an aristocratic Ibsen, touching reality with

a certain disdain, certainly with far less skill, certainly with far more beauty. But *Axël*, meditated over during a lifetime, shows us Villiers' ideal of his own idealism.

The action takes place, it is true, in this century, but it takes place in corners of the world into which the modern spirit has not yet passed; this *Monastère de Religieuses-trinitaires, le cloître de Sainte Apollodora, situé sur les confins du littoral de l'ancienne Flandre française*, and the *très vieux château fort, le burg des margraves d'Auërsperg, isolé au milieu du Schwartzwald.* The characters, Axël d'Auërsperg, Eve Sara Emmanuèle de Maupers, Maître Janus, the Archidiacre, the Commandeur Kaspar d'Auërsperg, are at once more and less than human beings: they are the types of different ideals, and they are clothed with just enough humanity to give form to what would otherwise remain disembodied spirit. The religious ideal, the occult ideal, the worldly ideal, the passionate ideal, are all presented, one after the other, in these dazzling and profound pages; Axël is the disdainful choice from among them, the disdainful rejection of life itself, of the whole illusion of life, "since infinity alone is not a deception." And Sara? Sara is a superb part of that life which is rejected, which she herself comes, not without reluctance, to reject. In that motionless figure, during the whole of the first act silent but for a single "No," and leaping into a moment's violent action as the act closes, she is the haughtiest woman in literature. But she is a woman, and she desires life, finding it in Axël. Pride, and the woman's devotion to the man, aid her to take the last cold step with Axël, in that transcendental giving up of life at the moment when life becomes ideal.

And the play is written, throughout, with a curious solemnity, a particular kind of eloquence, which makes no

attempt to imitate the level of the speech of every day, but which is a sort of ideal language in which beauty is aimed at as exclusively as if it were written in verse. The modern drama, under the democratic influence of Ibsen, the positive influence of Dumas *fils*, has limited itself to the expression of temperaments in the one case, of theoretic intelligences in the other, in as nearly as possible the words which the average man would use for the statement of his emotions and ideas. The form, that is, is degraded below the level of the characters whom it attempts to express; for it is evident that the average man can articulate only a small enough part of what he obscurely feels or thinks; and the theory of Realism is that his emotions and ideas are to be given only in so far as the words at his own command can give them. Villiers, choosing to concern himself only with exceptional characters, and with them only in the absolute, invents for them a more elaborate and a more magnificent speech than they would naturally employ, the speech of their thoughts, of their dreams.

And it is a world thought or dreamt in some more fortunate atmosphere than that in which we live, that Villiers has created for the final achievement of his abstract ideas. I do not doubt that he himself always lived in it, through all the poverty of the precipitous Rue des Martyrs. But it is in *Axël*, and in *Axël* only, that he has made us also inhabitants of that world. Even in *Elën* we are spectators, watching a tragical fairy play (as if *Fantasio* became suddenly in deadly earnest), watching someone else's dreams. *Axël* envelops us in its own atmosphere; it is as if we found ourselves on a mountain-top, on the other side of the clouds, and without surprise at finding ourselves there.

The ideal, to Villiers, being the real, spiritual beauty being

the essential beauty, and material beauty its reflection, or its revelation, it is with a sort of fury that he attacks the materialising forces of the world: science, progress, the worldly emphasis on "facts," on what is "positive," "serious," "respectable." Satire, with him, is the revenge of beauty upon ugliness, the persecution of the ugly; it is not merely social satire, it is a satire on the material universe by one who believes in a spiritual universe. Thus it is the only laughter of our time which is fundamental, as fundamental as that of Swift or Rabelais. And this lacerating laughter of the idealist is never surer in its aim than when it turns the arms of science against itself, as in the vast buffoonery of *L'Ève Future*. A Parisian wit, sharpened to a fineness of irony such as only wit which is also philosophy can attain, brings in another method of attack; humour, which is almost English, another; while again satire becomes tragic, fantastic, macabre. In those enigmatic "tales of the grotesque and arabesque," in which Villiers rivals Poe on his own ground, there is, for the most part, a multiplicity of meaning which is, as it is meant to be, disconcerting. I should not like to say how far Villiers does not, sometimes, believe in his own magic.

It is characteristic of him, at all events, that he employs what we call the supernatural alike in his works of pure idealism and in his works of sheer satire. The moment the world ceased to be the stable object, solidly encrusted with houses in brick and stone, which it is to most of its so temporary inhabitants, Villiers was at home. When he sought the absolute beauty, it was beyond the world that he found it; when he sought horror, it was a breath blowing from an invisible darkness which brought it to his nerves; when he desired to mock the pretensions of knowledge or of

ignorance, it was always with the unseen that his tragic buffoonery made familiar.

There is, in everything which Villiers wrote, a strangeness, certainly both instinctive and deliberate, which seems to me to be the natural consequence of that intellectual pride which, as I have pointed out, was at the basis of his character. He hated every kind of mediocrity: therefore he chose to analyse exceptional souls, to construct exceptional stories, to invent splendid names, and to evoke singular landscapes. It was part of his curiosity in souls to prefer the complex to the simple, the perverse to the straightforward, the ambiguous to either. His heroes are incarnations of spiritual pride, and their tragedies are the shock of spirit against matter, the invasion of spirit by matter, the temptation of spirit by spiritual evil. They seek the absolute, and find death; they seek wisdom, find love, and fall into spiritual decay; they seek reality, and find crime; they seek phantoms, and find themselves. They are on the borders of a wisdom too great for their capacity; they are haunted by dark powers, instincts of ambiguous passions; they are too lucid to be quite sane in their extravagances; they have not quite systematically transposed their dreams into action. And his heroines, when they are not, like *L'Ève Future*, the vitalised mechanism of an Edison, have the solemnity of dead people, and a hieratic speech. *Songe, des cœurs condamnés à ce supplice, de ne pas m'aimer!* says Sara, in *Axël*. *Je ne l'aime pas, ce jeune homme. Qu'ai-je donc fait à Dieu?* says Elën. And their voice is always like the voice of Elën: "I listened attentively to the sound of her voice; it was taciturn, subdued, like the murmur of the river Lethe, flowing through the region of shadows." They have the immortal weariness of beauty, they are enigmas to themselves, they desire, and

know not why they refrain, they do good and evil with the lifting of an eyelid, and are innocent and guilty of all the sins of the earth.

And these strange inhabitants move in as strange a world. They are the princes and châtelaines of ancient castles lost in the depths of the Black Forest; they are the last descendants of a great race about to come to an end; students of magic, who have the sharp and swift swords of the soldier; enigmatic courtesans, at the table of strange feasts; they find incalculable treasures, *tonnantes et sonnantes cataractes d'or liquide*, only to disdain them. All the pomp of the world approaches them, that they may the better abnegate it, or that it may ruin them to a deeper degree of their material hell. And we see them always at the moment of a crisis, before the two ways of a decision, hesitating in the entanglements of a great temptation. And this casuist of souls will drag forth some horribly stunted or horribly overgrown soul from under its obscure covering, setting it to dance naked before our eyes. He has no mercy on those who have no mercy on themselves.

In the sense in which that word is ordinarily used, Villiers has no pathos. This is enough to explain why he can never, in the phrase he would have disliked so greatly, "touch the popular heart." His mind is too abstract to contain pity, and it is in his lack of pity that he seems to put himself outside humanity. *A chacun son infini*, he has said, and in the avidity of his search for the infinite he has no mercy for the blind weakness which goes stumbling over the earth, without so much as knowing that the sun and stars are overhead. He sees only the gross multitude, the multitude which has the contentment of the slave. He cannot pardon stupidity, for it is incomprehensible to him. He sees,

rightly, that stupidity is more criminal than vice; if only because vice is curable, stupidity incurable. But he does not realise, as the great novelists have realised, that stupidity can be pathetic, and that there is not a peasant, nor even a self-satisfied bourgeois, in whom the soul has not its part, in whose existence it is not possible to be interested.

Contempt, noble as it may be, anger, righteous though it may be, cannot be indulged in without a certain lack of sympathy; and lack of sympathy comes from a lack of patient understanding. It is certain that the destiny of the greater part of the human race is either infinitely pathetic or infinitely ridiculous. Under which aspect, then, shall that destiny, and those obscure fractions of humanity, be considered? Villiers was too sincere an idealist, too absolute in his idealism, to hesitate. "As for living," he cries, in that splendid phrase of *Axël*, "our servants will do that for us!" And, in the *Contes Cruels*, there is this not less characteristic expression of what was always his mental attitude: "As at the play, in a central stall, one sits out, so as not to disturb one's neighbours—out of courtesy, in a word—some play written in a wearisome style and of which one does not like the subject, so I lived, out of politeness": *je vivais par politesse*. In this haughtiness towards life, in this disdain of ordinary human motives and ordinary human beings, there is at once the distinction and the weakness of Villiers. And he has himself pointed the moral against himself in these words of the story which forms the epilogue to the *Contes Cruels*: "When the forehead alone contains the existence of a man, that man is enlightened only from above his head; then his jealous shadow, prostrate under him, draws him by the feet, that it may drag him down into the invisible."

iii

All his life Villiers was a poor man; though, all his life, he was awaiting that fortune which he refused to anticipate by any mean employment. During most of his life, he was practically an unknown man. Greatly loved, ardently admired, by that inner circle of the men who have made modern French literature, from Verlaine to Maeterlinck, he was looked upon by most people as an amusing kind of madman, a little dangerous, whose ideas, as they floated freely over the café-table, it was at times highly profitable to steal. For Villiers talked his works before writing them, and sometimes he talked them instead of writing them, in his too royally spendthrift way. To those who knew him he seemed genius itself, and would have seemed so if he had never written a line; for he had the dangerous gift of a personality which seems to have already achieved all that it so energetically contemplates. But personality tells only within hands' reach; and Villiers failed even to startle, failed even to exasperate, the general reader. That his *Premières Poésies*, published at the age of nineteen, should have brought him fame was hardly to be expected, remarkable, especially in its ideas, as that book is. Nor was it to be expected of the enigmatic fragment of a romance, *Isis* (1862), anticipating, as it does, by so long a period, the esoteric and spiritualistic romances which were to have their vogue. But *Elën* (1864) and *Morgane* (1865), those two poetic dramas in prose, so full of distinction, of spiritual rarity; but two years later, *Claire Lenoir* (afterwards incorporated in one of his really great books, *Tribulat Bonhomet*), with its macabre horror; but *La Révolte* (1870), for Villiers so "actual," and which had its moment's success

when it was revived in 1896 at the Odéon; but *Le Nouveau Monde* (1880), a drama which, by some extraordinary caprice, won a prize; but *Les Contes Cruels* (1880), that collection of masterpieces, in which the essentially French *conte* is outdone on its own ground! It was not till 1886 that Villiers ceased to be an unknown writer, with the publication of that phosphorescent buffoonery of science, that vast parody of humanity, *L'Ève Future*. *Tribulat Bonhomet* (which he himself defined as *bouffonnerie énorme et sombre, couleur du siècle*) was to come, in its final form, and the superb poem in prose *Akëdysséril*; and then, more and more indifferent collections of stories, in which Villiers, already dying, is but the shadow of himself: *L'Amour Suprême* (1886), *Histoires Insolites* (1888), *Nouveaux Contes Cruels* (1888). He was correcting the proofs of *Axël* when he died; the volume was published in 1890, followed by *Propos d'au-delà*, and a series of articles, *Chez les Passants*. Once dead, the fame which had avoided him all his life began to follow him; he had *une belle presse* at his funeral.

Meanwhile, he had been preparing the spiritual atmosphere of the new generation. Living among believers in the material world, he had been declaring, not in vain, his belief in the world of the spirit; living among Realists and Parnassians, he had been creating a new form of art, the art of the Symbolist drama, and of Symbolism in fiction. He had been lonely all his life, for he had been living, in his own lifetime, the life of the next generation. There was but one man among his contemporaries to whom he could give, and from whom he could receive, perfect sympathy. That man was Wagner. Gradually the younger men came about him; at the end he was not lacking in disciples.

And after all, the last word of Villiers is faith; faith

against the evidence of the senses, against the negations of materialistic science, against the monstrous paradox of progress, against his own pessimism in the face of these formidable enemies. He affirms; he "believes in soul, is very sure of God"; requires no witness to the spiritual world of which he is always the inhabitant; and is content to lose his way in the material world, brushing off its mud from time to time with a disdainful gesture, as he goes on his way (to apply a significant word of Pater) "like one on a secret errand."

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

THAT story of the Arabian Nights, which is at the same time a true story, the life of Rimbaud, has been told, for the first time, in the extravagant but valuable book of an anarchist of letters, who writes under the name of Paterne Berrichon, and who has since married Rimbaud's sister. *La Vie de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud* is full of curiosity for those who have been mystified by I know not what legends, invented to give wonder to a career, itself more wonderful than any of the inventions. The man who died at Marseilles, at the Hospital of the Conception, on March 10, 1891, at the age of thirty-seven, *négociant*, as the register of his death describes him, was a writer of genius, an innovator in verse and prose, who had written all his poetry by the age of nineteen, and all his prose by a year or two later. He had given up literature to travel hither and thither, first in Europe, then in Africa; he had been an engineer, a leader of caravans, a merchant of precious merchandise. And this man, who had never written down a line after those astonishing early experiments, was heard, in his last delirium, talking of precisely such visions as those which had haunted his youth, and using, says his sister, "expressions of a singular and penetrating charm" to render these sensations of visionary countries. Here certainly is one of the most curious problems of literature: is it a problem of which we can discover the secret?

Jean-Nicolas-Arthur Rimbaud was born at Charleville, in the Ardennes, October 28, 1854. His father, of whom he saw little, was a captain in the army; his mother, of peasant origin, was severe, rigid, and unsympathetic. At school he was an unwilling but brilliant scholar, and by his fifteenth year was well acquainted with Latin literature and intimately with French literature. It was in that year that he began to write poems, from the first curiously original: eleven poems dating from that year are to be found in his collected works. When he was sixteen he decided that he had had enough of school, and enough of home. Only Paris existed: he must go to Paris. The first time he went without a ticket; he spent, indeed, fifteen days in Paris, but he spent them in Mazas, from which he was released and restored to his home by his schoolmaster. The second time, a few days later, he sold his watch, which paid for his railway ticket. This time he threw himself on the hospitality of André Gill, a painter and verse-writer, of some little notoriety then, whose address he had happened to come across. The uninvited guest was not welcomed, and after some penniless days in Paris he tramped back to Charleville. The third time (he had waited five months, writing poems, and discontented to be only writing poems) he made his way to Paris on foot, in a heat of revolutionary sympathy, to offer himself to the insurgents of the Commune. Again he had to return on foot. Finally, having learnt with difficulty that a man is not taken at his own valuation until he has proved his right to be so accepted, he sent up the manuscript of his poems to Verlaine. The manuscript contained *Le Bateau Ivre*, *Les Premières Communions*, *Ma Bohème*, *Roman*, *Les Effarés*, and, indeed, all but a few of the poems he ever wrote. Verlaine was overwhelmed with delight, and

invited him to Paris. A local admirer lent him the money to get there, and from October 1871 to July 1872 he was Verlaine's guest.

The boy of seventeen, already a perfectly original poet, and beginning to be an equally original prose-writer, astonished the whole Parnasse, Banville, Hugo himself. On Verlaine his influence was more profound. The meeting brought about one of those lamentable and admirable disasters which make and unmake careers. Verlaine has told us in his *Confessions* that, " in the beginning, there was no question of any sort of affection or sympathy between two natures so different as that of the poet of the *Assis* and mine, but simply of an extreme admiration and astonishment before this boy of sixteen, who had already written things, as Fénélon has excellently said, ' perhaps outside literature.' " This admiration and astonishment passed gradually into a more personal feeling, and it was under the influence of Rimbaud that the long vagabondage of Verlaine's life began. The two poets wandered together through Belgium, England, and again Belgium, from July 1872 to August 1873, when there occurred that tragic parting at Brussels which left Verlaine a prisoner for eighteen months, and sent Rimbaud back to his family. He had already written all the poetry and prose that he was ever to write, and in 1873 he printed at Brussels *Une Saison en Enfer*. It was the only book he himself ever gave to the press, and no sooner was it printed than he destroyed the whole edition, with the exception of a few copies, of which only Verlaine's copy, I believe, still exists. Soon began new wanderings, with their invariable return to the starting-point of Charleville : a few days in Paris, a year in England, four months in Stuttgart (where he was visited by Verlaine), Italy, France again,

Vienna, Java, Holland, Sweden, Egypt, Cyprus, Abyssinia, and then nothing but Africa, until the final return to France. He had been a teacher of French in England, a seller of key-rings in the streets of Paris, had unloaded vessels in the ports, and helped to gather in the harvest in the country; he had been a volunteer in the Dutch army, a military engineer, a trader; and now physical sciences had begun to attract his insatiable curiosity, and dreams of the fabulous East began to resolve themselves into dreams of a romantic commerce with the real East. He became a merchant of coffee, perfumes, ivory, and gold, in the interior of Africa; then an explorer, a predecessor, and in his own regions, of Marchand. After twelve years' wandering and exposure in Africa he was attacked by a malady of the knee, which rapidly became worse. He was transported first to Aden, then to Marseilles, where, in May 1891, his leg was amputated. Further complications set in. He insisted, first, on being removed to his home, then on being taken back to Marseilles. His sufferings were an intolerable torment, and more cruel to him was the torment of his desire to live. He died inch by inch, fighting every inch; and his sister's quiet narrative of those last months is agonising. He died at Marseilles in November, "prophesying," says his sister, and repeating, "Allah Kerim! Allah Kerim!"

The secret of Rimbaud, I think, and the reason why he was able to do the unique thing in literature which he did, and then to disappear quietly and become a legend in the East, is that his mind was not the mind of the artist but of the man of action. He was a dreamer, but all his dreams were discoveries. To him it was an identical act of his temperament to write the sonnet of the *Vowels* and to trade in ivory and frankincense with the Arabs. He lived with

all his faculties at every instant of his life, abandoning himself to himself with a confidence which was at once his strength and (looking at things less absolutely) his weakness. To the student of success, and what is relative in achievement, he illustrates the danger of one's over-possession by one's own genius, just as aptly as the saint in the cloister does, or the mystic too full of God to speak intelligibly to the world, or the spilt wisdom of the drunkard. The artist who is above all things an artist cultivates a little choice corner of himself with elaborate care; he brings miraculous flowers to growth there, but the rest of the garden is but mown grass or tangled bushes. That is why many excellent writers, very many painters, and most musicians are so tedious on any subject but their own. Is it not tempting, does it not seem a devotion rather than a superstition, to worship the golden chalice in which the wine has been made God, as if the chalice were the reality, and the Real Presence the symbol? The artist, who is only an artist, circumscribes his intelligence into almost such a fiction, as he reverences the work of his own hands. But there are certain natures (great or small, Shakespeare or Rimbaud, it makes no difference) to whom the work is nothing; the act of working, everything. Rimbaud was a small, narrow, hard, precipitate nature, which had the will to live, and nothing but the will to live; and his verses, and his follies, and his wanderings, and his traffickings were but the breathing of different hours in his day.

That is why he is so swift, definite, and quickly exhausted in vision; why he had his few things to say, each an action with consequences. He invents new ways of saying things, not because he is a learned artist, but because he is burning to say them, and he has none of the hesitations of knowledge. He leaps right over or through the conventions that had

been standing in everybody's way; he has no time to go round, and no respect for trespass-boards, and so he becomes the *enfant terrible* of literature, playing pranks (as in that sonnet of the *Vowels*), knocking down barriers for the mere amusement of the thing, getting all the possible advantage of his barbarisms in mind and conduct. And so, in life, he is first of all conspicuous as a disorderly liver, a revolter against morals as against prosody, though we may imagine that, in his heart, morals meant as little to him, one way or the other, as prosody. Later on, his revolt seems to be against civilisation itself, as he disappears into the deserts of Africa. And it is, if you like, a revolt against civilisation, but the revolt is instinctive, a need of the organism; it is not doctrinal, cynical, a conviction, a sentiment.

Always, as he says, *rêvant univers fantastiques*, he is conscious of the danger as well as the ecstasy of that divine imitation; for he says: "My life will always be too vast to be given up wholly to force and beauty." *J'attends Dieu avec gourmandise*, he cries, in a fine rapture; and then, sadly enough: "I have created all the feasts, all the triumphs, all the dramas of the world. I have set myself to invent new flowers, a new flesh, a new language. I have fancied that I have attained supernatural power. Well, I have now only to put my imagination and my memories in the grave. What a fine artist's and storyteller's fame thrown away!" See how completely he is conscious, and how completely he is at the mercy, of that hallucinatory range of vision, vision to him being always force, power, creation, which on some of his pages seems to become sheer madness, and on others a kind of wild but absolute insight. He will be silent, he tells us, as to all that he contains within his mind, "greedy as the sea," for otherwise poets and visionaries would envy him

his fantastic wealth. And, in that *Nuit d'Enfer*, which does not bear that title in vain, he exalts himself as a kind of saviour; he is in the circle of pride in Dante's hell, and he has lost all sense of limit, really believes himself to be "no one and some one." Then, in the *Alchimie du Verbe*, he becomes the analyst of his own hallucinations. "I believe in all the enchantments," he tells us; "I invented the colour of the vowels: A, black; E, white; I, red; O, blue; U, green.[1] I regulated the form and the movement of every consonant, and, with instinctive rhythms, I flattered myself that I had invented a poetic language accessible, one day or another, to every shade of meaning. I reserved to myself the right

[1] Here is the famous sonnet, which must be taken, as it was meant, without undue seriousness, and yet as something more than a mere joke.

VOYELLES

A noir, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O bleu, voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances latentes.
A, noir corset velu des mouches éclatantes
Qui bombillent autour des puanteurs cruelles,

Golfe d'ombre; E, candeur des vapeurs et des tentes,
Lance des glaciers fiers, rois blancs, frissons d'ombelles;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire, des lèvres belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses pénitentes;

U, cycles, vibrements divins des mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands fronts studieux;

O, suprême Clairon plein de strideurs étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des Anges:
— O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux!

Coincidence or origin, it has lately been pointed out that Rimbaud may formerly have seen an old A B C book in which the vowels are coloured for the most part as his are (A, black; E, yellow; I, red; O, blue; U, green). In the little illustrative pictures around them some are oddly in keeping with the images of Rimbaud.

of translation . . . I accustomed myself to simple hallucination: I saw, quite frankly, a mosque in place of a factory, a school of drums kept by the angels, post-chaises on the roads of heaven, a drawing-room at the bottom of a lake; monsters, mysteries; the title of a vaudeville raised up horrors before me. Then I explained my magical sophisms by the hallucination of words! I ended by finding something sacred in the disorder of my mind." Then he makes the great discovery. Action, one sees, this fraudulent and insistent will to live, has been at the root of all these mental and verbal orgies, in which he has been wasting the very substance of his thought. Well, "action," he discovers, "is not life, but a way of spoiling something." Even this is a form of enervation, and must be rejected from the absolute. *Mon devoir m'est remis. Il ne faut plus songer à cela. Je suis réellement d'outre-tombe, et pas de commissions.*

It is for the absolute that he seeks, always; the absolute which the great artist, with his careful wisdom, has renounced seeking. And he is content with nothing less; hence his own contempt for what he has done, after all, so easily; for what has come to him, perhaps through his impatience, but imperfectly. He is a dreamer in whom dream is swift, hard in outline, coming suddenly and going suddenly, a real thing, but seen only in passing. Visions rush past him, he cannot arrest them; they rush forth from him, he cannot restrain their haste to be gone, as he creates them in the mere indiscriminate idleness of energy. And so this seeker after the absolute leaves but a broken medley of fragments, into each of which he has put a little of his personality, which he is for ever dramatising, by multiplying one facet, so to speak, after another. Very genuinely, he is now a beaten and wandering ship, flying in a sort of intoxication

before the wind, over undiscovered seas; now a starving child outside a baker's window, in the very ecstasy of hunger; now *la victime et la petite épouse* of the first communion; now:

> *Je ne parlerai pas, je ne penserai rien;*
> *Mais l'amour infini me montera dans l'âme,*
> *Et j'irai loin, bien loin, comme un bohémien,*
> *Par la Nature, heureux comme avec une femme!*

He catches at verse, at prose, invents a sort of *vers libre* before anyone else, not quite knowing what to do with it, invents a quite new way of writing prose, which Laforgue will turn to account later on; and having suggested, with some impatience, half the things that his own and the next generation are to busy themselves with developing, he gives up writing, as an inadequate form, to which he is also inadequate.

What, then, is the actual value of Rimbaud's work, in verse and prose, apart from its relative values of so many kinds? I think, considerable; though it will probably come to rest on two or three pieces of verse, and a still vaguer accomplishment in prose. He brought into French verse something of that "gipsy way of going with nature, as with a woman"; a very young, very crude, very defiant, and sometimes very masterly sense of just those real things which are too close to us to be seen by most people with any clearness. He could render physical sensation, of the subtlest kind, without making any compromise with language, forcing language to speak straight, taming it as one would tame a dangerous animal. And he kneaded prose as he kneaded verse, making it a disarticulated, abstract, mathematically lyrical thing. In verse, he pointed the way to

certain new splendours, as to certain new *naïvetés*; there is the *Bateau Ivre*, without which we might never have had Verlaine's *Crimen Amoris*. And, intertangled with what is ingenuous, and with what is splendid, there is a certain irony, which comes into that youthful work as if youth were already reminiscent of itself, so conscious is it that youth is youth, and that youth is passing.

In all these ways, Rimbaud had his influence upon Verlaine, and his influence upon Verlaine was above all the influence of the man of action upon the man of sensation; the influence of what is simple, narrow, emphatic, upon what is subtle, complex, growing. Verlaine's rich, sensitive nature was just then trying to realise itself. Just because it had such delicate possibilities, because there were so many directions in which it could grow, it was not at first quite sure of its way. Rimbaud came into the life and art of Verlaine, troubling both, with that trouble which reveals a man to himself. Having helped to make Verlaine a great poet, he could go. Note that he himself could never have developed: writing had been one of his discoveries; he could but make other discoveries, personal ones. Even in literature he had his future; but his future was Verlaine.

PAUL VERLAINE

i

"BIEN affectueusement . . . yours, P. Verlaine." So, in its gay and friendly mingling of French and English, ended the last letter I had from Verlaine. A few days afterwards came the telegram from Paris telling me of his death, in the Rue Descartes, on that 8th January 1896.

"Condemned to death," as he was, in Victor Hugo's phrase of men in general, "with a sort of indefinite reprieve," and gravely ill as I had for some time known him to be, it was still with a shock, not only of sorrow, but of surprise, that I heard the news of his death. He had suffered and survived so much, and I found it so hard to associate the idea of death with one who had always been so passionately in love with life, more passionately in love with life than any man I ever knew. Rest was one of the delicate privileges of life which he never loved: he did but endure it with grumbling gaiety when a hospital-bed claimed him. And whenever he spoke to me of the long rest which has now sealed his eyelids, it was with a shuddering revolt from the thought of ever going away into the cold, out of the sunshine which had been so warm to him. With all his pains, misfortunes, and the calamities which followed him step by step all his life, I think few men ever got so much out of their lives, or lived so fully, so intensely, with such a genius for living. That, indeed, is why he was a great poet. Verlaine

was a man who gave its full value to every moment, who got out of every moment all that that moment had to give him. It was not always, not often, perhaps, pleasure. But it was energy, the vital force of a nature which was always receiving and giving out, never at rest, never passive, or indifferent, or hesitating. It is impossible for me to convey to those who did not know him any notion of how sincere he was. The word "sincerity" seems hardly to have emphasis enough to say, in regard to this one man, what it says, adequately enough, of others. He sinned, and it was with all his humanity; he repented, and it was with all his soul. And to every occurrence of the day, to every mood of the mind, to every impulse of the creative instinct, he brought the same unparalleled sharpness of sensation. When, in 1894, he was my guest in London, I was amazed by the exactitude of his memory of the mere turnings of the streets, the shapes and colours of the buildings, which he had not seen for twenty years. He saw, he felt, he remembered, everything, with an unconscious mental selection of the fine shades, the essential part of things, or precisely those aspects which most other people would pass by.

Few poets of our time have been more often drawn, few have been easier to draw, few have better repaid drawing, than Paul Verlaine. A face without a beautiful line, a face all character, full of somnolence and sudden fire, in which every irregularity was a kind of aid to the hand, could not but tempt the artist desiring at once to render a significant likeness and to have his own part in the creation of a picture. Verlaine, like all men of genius, had something of the air of the somnambulist; that profound slumber of the face, as it was in him, with its startling awakenings. It was a face devoured by dreams, feverish and somnolent; it had earthly

passion, intellectual pride, spiritual humility; the air of one who remembers, not without an effort, who is listening, half distractedly, to something which other people do not hear; coming back so suddenly, and from so far, with the relief of one who steps out of that obscure shadow into the noisier forgetfulness of life. The eyes, often half closed, were like the eyes of a cat between sleeping and waking; eyes in which contemplation was "itself an act." A remarkable lithograph by Mr. Rothenstein (the face lit by oblique eyes, the folded hand thrust into the cheek) gives with singular truth the sensation of that restless watch on things which this prisoner of so many chains kept without slackening. To Verlaine every corner of the world was alive with tempting and consoling and terrifying beauty. I have never known anyone to whom the sight of the eyes was so intense and imaginative a thing. To him, physical sight and spiritual vision, by some strange alchemical operation of the brain, were one. And in the disquietude of his face, which seemed to take such close heed of things, precisely because it was sufficiently apart from them to be always a spectator, there was a realisable process of vision continually going on, in which all the loose ends of the visible world were being caught up into a new mental fabric.

And along with this fierce subjectivity, into which the egoism of the artist entered so unconsciously, and in which it counted for so much, there was more than the usual amount of childishness, always in some measure present in men of genius. There was a real, almost blithe, childishness in the way in which he would put on his "Satanic" expression, of which it was part of the joke that everyone should not be quite in the secret. It was a whim of this kind which made him put at the beginning of *Romances*

sans Paroles that very criminal image of a head which had so little resemblance with even the shape, indeed curious enough, of his actual head. "Born under the sign of Saturn," as he no doubt was, with that "old prisoner's head" of which he tells us, it was by his amazing faculty for a simple kind of happiness that he always impressed me. I have never seen so cheerful an invalid as he used to be at that hospital, the Hôpital Saint-Louis, where at one time I used to go and see him every week. His whole face seemed to chuckle as he would tell me, in his emphatic, confiding way, everything that entered into his head; the droll stories cut short by a groan, a lamentation, a sudden fury of reminiscence, at which his face would cloud or convulse, the wild eyebrows slanting up and down; and then, suddenly, the good laugh would be back, clearing the air. No one was ever so responsive to his own moods as Verlaine, and with him every mood had the vehemence of a passion. Is not his whole art a delicate waiting upon moods, with that perfect confidence in them as they are, which it is a large part of ordinary education to discourage in us, and a large part of experience to repress? But to Verlaine, happily, experience taught nothing; or rather, it taught him only to cling the more closely to those moods in whose succession lies the more intimate part of our spiritual life.

It is no doubt well for society that man should learn by experience; for the artist the benefit is doubtful. The artist, it cannot be too clearly understood, has no more part in society than a monk in domestic life: he cannot be judged by its rules, he can be neither praised nor blamed for his acceptance or rejection of its conventions. Social rules are made by normal people for normal people, and the man of genius is fundamentally abnormal. It is the poet against

society, society against the poet, a direct antagonism; the shock of which, however, it is often possible to avoid by a compromise. So much licence is allowed on the one side, so much liberty forgone on the other. The consequences are not always of the best, art being generally the loser. But there are certain natures to which compromise is impossible; and the nature of Verlaine was one of these natures.

"The soul of an immortal child," says one who has understood him better than others, Charles Morice, "that is the soul of Verlaine, with all the privileges and all the perils of so being: with the sudden despair so easily distracted, the vivid gaieties without a cause, the excessive suspicions and the excessive confidences, the whims so easily outwearied, the deaf and blind infatuations, with, especially, the unceasing renewal of impressions in the incorruptible integrity of personal vision and sensation. Years, influences, teachings, may pass over a temperament such as this, may irritate it, may fatigue it; transform it, never—never so much as to alter that particular unity which consists in a dualism, in the division of forces between the longing after what is evil and the adoration of what is good; or rather, in the antagonism of spirit and flesh. Other men 'arrange' their lives, take sides, follow one direction; Verlaine hesitates before a choice, which seems to him monstrous, for, with the integral *naïveté* of irrefutable human truth, he cannot resign himself, however strong may be the doctrine, however enticing may be the passion, to the necessity of sacrificing one to the other, and from one to the other he oscillates without a moment's repose."

It is in such a sense as this that Verlaine may be said to have learnt nothing from experience, in the sense that he

learnt everything direct from life, and without comparing day with day. That the exquisite artist of the *Fêtes Galantes* should become the great poet of *Sagesse*, it was needful that things should have happened as disastrously as they did: the marriage with the girl-wife, that brief idyl, the passion for drink, those other forbidden passions, vagabondage, an attempted crime, the eighteen months of prison, conversion; followed, as it had to be, by relapse, bodily sickness, poverty, beggary almost, a lower and lower descent into mean distresses. It was needful that all this should happen, in order that the spiritual vision should eclipse the material vision; but it was needful that all this should happen in vain, so far as the conduct of life was concerned. Reflection, in Verlaine, is pure waste; it is the speech of the soul and the speech of the eyes, that we must listen to in his verse, never the speech of the reason. And I call him fortunate because, going through life with a great unconsciousness of what most men spend their lives in considering, he was able to abandon himself entirely to himself, to his unimpeded vision, to his unchecked emotion, to the passionate sincerity which in him was genius.

ii

French poetry, before Verlaine, was an admirable vehicle for a really fine, a really poetical, kind of rhetoric. With Victor Hugo, for the first time since Ronsard (the two or three masterpieces of Ronsard and his companions) it had learnt to sing; with Baudelaire it had invented a new vocabulary for the expression of subtle, often perverse, essentially modern emotion and sensation. But with Victor Hugo, with Baudelaire, we are still under the dominion of

rhetoric. "Take eloquence, and wring its neck!" said Verlaine in his *Art Poétique*; and he showed, by writing it, that French verse could be written without rhetoric. It was partly from his study of English models that he learnt the secret of liberty in verse, but it was much more a secret found by the way, in the mere endeavour to be absolutely sincere, to express exactly what he saw, to give voice to his own temperament, in which intensity of feeling seemed to find its own expression, as if by accident. *L'art, mes enfants, c'est d'être absolument soi-même*, he tells us in one of his later poems; and, with such a personality as Verlaine's to express, what more has art to do, if it would truly, and in any interesting manner, hold the mirror up to nature?

For, consider the natural qualities which this man had for the task of creating a new poetry. "Sincerity, and the impression of the moment followed to the letter": that is how he defined his theory of style, in an article written about himself.

Car nous voulons la nuance encor,
Pas la couleur, rien que la nuance!

as he cries, in his famous *Art Poétique*. Take, then, his susceptibility of the senses, an emotional susceptibility not less delicate; a life sufficiently troubled to draw out every emotion of which he was capable, and, with it, that absorption in the moment, that inability to look before or after; the need to love and the need to confess, each a passion; an art of painting the fine shades of landscape, of evoking atmosphere, which can be compared only with the art of Whistler; a simplicity of language which is the direct outcome of a simplicity of temperament, with just enough consciousness of itself for a final elegance; and, at the very

depth of his being, an almost fierce humility, by which the passion of love, after searching furiously through all his creatures, finds God by the way, and kneels in the dust before him. Verlaine was never a theorist: he left theories to Mallarmé. He had only his divination; and he divined that poetry, always desiring that miracles should happen, had never waited patiently enough upon the miracle. It was by that proud and humble mysticism of his temperament that he came to realise how much could be done by, in a sense, trying to do nothing.

And then: *De la musique avant toute chose; De la musique encore et toujours!* There are poems of Verlaine which go as far as verse can go to become pure music, the voice of a bird with a human soul. It is part of his simplicity, his divine childishness, that he abandons himself, at times, to the song which words begin to sing in the air, with the same wise confidence with which he abandons himself to the other miracles about him. He knows that words are living things, which we have not created, and which go their way without demanding of us the right to live. He knows that words are suspicious, not without their malice, and that they resist mere force with the impalpable resistance of fire or water. They are to be caught only with guile or with trust. Verlaine has both, and words become Ariel to him. They bring him not only that submission of the slave which they bring to others, but all the soul, and in a happy bondage. They transform themselves for him into music, colour, and shadow; a disembodied music, diaphanous colours, luminous shadow. They serve him with so absolute a self-negation that he can write *romances sans paroles*, songs almost without words, in which scarcely a sense of the interference of human speech remains. The ideal of lyric poetry, certainly, is to be

this passive, flawless medium for the deeper consciousness of things, the mysterious voice of that mystery which lies about us, out of which we have come, and into which we shall return. It is not without reason that we cannot analyse a perfect lyric.

With Verlaine the sense of hearing and the sense of sight are almost interchangeable: he paints with sound, and his line and atmosphere become music. It was with the most precise accuracy that Whistler applied the terms of music to his painting, for painting, when it aims at being the vision of reality, *pas la couleur, rien que la nuance*, passes almost into the condition of music. Verlaine's landscape painting is always an evocation, in which outline is lost in atmosphere.

C'est des beaux yeux derrière des voiles,
C'est le grand jour tremblant de midi,
C'est, par un ciel d'automne attiédi,
Le bleu fouillis des claires étoiles!

He was a man, certainly, "for whom the visible world existed," but for whom it existed always as a vision. He absorbed it through all his senses, as the true mystic absorbs the divine beauty. And so he created in verse a new voice for nature, full of the humble ecstasy with which he saw, listened, accepted.

Cette âme qui se lamente
En cette plaine dormante
C'est la nôtre, n'est-ce pas?
La mienne, dis, et la tienne,
Dont s'exhale l'humble antienne
Par ce tiède soir, tout bas?

And with the same attentive simplicity with which he found words for the sensations of hearing and the sensations of sight, he found words for the sensations of the soul, for the

fine shades of feeling. From the moment when his inner life may be said to have begun, he was occupied with the task of an unceasing confession, in which one seems to overhear him talking to himself, in that vague, preoccupied way which he often had. Here again are words which startle one by their delicate resemblance to thoughts, by their winged flight from so far, by their alighting so close. The verse murmurs, with such an ingenuous confidence, such intimate secrets. That "setting free" of verse, which is one of the achievements of Verlaine, was itself mainly an attempt to be more and more sincere, a way of turning poetic artifice to new account, by getting back to nature itself, hidden away under the eloquent rhetoric of Hugo, Baudelaire, and the Parnassians. In the devotion of rhetoric to either beauty or truth, there is a certain consciousness of an audience, of an external judgment: rhetoric would convince, be admired. It is the very essence of poetry to be unconscious of anything between its own moment of flight and the supreme beauty which it will never attain. Verlaine taught French poetry that wise and subtle unconsciousness. It was in so doing that he "fused his personality," in the words of Verhaeren, "so profoundly with beauty, that he left upon it the imprint of a new and henceforth eternal attitude."

iii

J'ai la fureur d'aimer, says Verlaine, in a passage of very personal significance.

J'ai la fureur d'aimer. Mon cœur si faible est fou.
N'importe quand, n'importe quel et n'importe où,
Qu'un éclair de beauté, de vertu, de vaillance,
Luise, il s'y précipite, il y vole, il y lance,

Et, le temps d'une étreinte, il embrasse cent fois
L'être ou l'objet qu'il a poursuivi de son choix ;
Puis, quand l'illusion a replié son aile,
Il revient triste et seul bien souvent, mais fidèle,
Et laissant aux ingrats quelque chose de lui,
Sang ou chair . . .
J'ai la fureur d'aimer. Qu'y faire ? Ah, laissez faire !

And certainly this admirable, and supremely dangerous, quality was at the root of Verlaine's nature. Instinctive, unreasoning as he was, entirely at the mercy of the emotion or impression which, for the moment, had seized upon him, it was inevitable that he should be completely at the mercy of the most imperious of instincts, of passions, and of intoxications. And he had the simple and ardent nature, in this again consistently childlike, to which love, some kind of affection, given or returned, is not the luxury, the exception, which it is to many natures, but a daily necessity. To such a temperament there may or may not be the one great passion ; there will certainly be many passions. And in Verlaine I find that single, childlike necessity of loving and being loved, all through his life and on every page of his works ; I find it, unchanged in essence, but constantly changing form, in his chaste and unchaste devotions to women, in his passionate friendships with men, in his supreme mystical adoration of God.

To turn from *La Bonne Chanson*, written for a wedding present to a young wife, to *Chansons pour Elle*, written more than twenty years later, in dubious honour of a middle-aged mistress, is to travel a long road, the hard, long road which Verlaine had travelled during those years. His life was ruinous, a disaster, more sordid perhaps than the life of any

other poet; and he could write of it, from a hospital-bed, with this quite sufficient sense of its deprivations. "But all the same, it is hard," he laments, in *Mes Hôpitaux*, "after a life of work, set off, I admit, with accidents in which I have had a large share, catastrophes perhaps vaguely premeditated—it is hard, I say, at forty-seven years of age, in full possession of all the reputation (of the *success*, to use the frightful current phrase) to which my highest ambitions could aspire—hard, hard, hard indeed, worse than hard, to find myself—good God!—to find myself *on the streets*, and to have nowhere to lay my head and support an ageing body save the pillows and the *menus* of a public charity, even now uncertain, and which might at any moment be withdrawn —God forbid!—without, apparently, the fault of anyone, oh! not even, and above all, not mine." Yet, after all, these sordid miseries, this poor man's vagabondage, all the misfortunes of one certainly "irreclaimable," on which so much stress has been laid, alike by friends and by foes, are externalities; they are not the man; the man, the eternal lover, passionate and humble, remains unchanged, while only his shadow wanders, from morning to night of the long day.

The poems to Rimbaud, to Lucien Létinois, to others, the whole volume of *Dédicaces*, cover perhaps as wide a range of sentiment as *La Bonne Chanson* and *Chansons pour Elle*. The poetry of friendship has never been sung with such plaintive sincerity, such simple human feeling, as in some of these poems, which can only be compared, in modern poetry, with a poem for which Verlaine had a great admiration, Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Only, with Verlaine, the thing itself, the affection or the regret, is everything; there is no room for meditation over destiny, or search for a

problematical consolation. Other poems speak a more difficult language, in which, doubtless, *l'ennui de vivre avec les gens et dans les choses* counts for much, and *la fureur d'aimer* for more.

In spite of the general impression to the contrary, an impression which by no means displeased himself, I must contend that the sensuality of Verlaine, brutal as it could sometimes be, was after all simple rather than complicated, instinctive rather than perverse. In the poetry of Baudelaire, with which the poetry of Verlaine is so often compared, there is a deliberate science of sensual perversity which has something almost monachal in its accentuation of vice with horror, in its passionate devotion to passions. Baudelaire brings every complication of taste, the exasperation of perfumes, the irritant of cruelty, the very odours and colours of corruption, to the creation and adornment of a sort of religion, in which an eternal mass is served before a veiled altar. There is no confession, no absolution, not a prayer is permitted which is not set down in the ritual. With Verlaine, however often love may pass into sensuality, to whatever length sensuality may be hurried, sensuality is never more than the malady of love. It is love desiring the absolute, seeking in vain, seeking always, and, finally, out of the depths, finding God.

Verlaine's conversion took place while he was in prison, during those solitary eighteen months in company with his thoughts, that enforced physical inactivity, which could but concentrate his whole energy on the only kind of sensation then within his capacity, the sensations of the soul and of the conscience. With that promptitude of abandonment which was his genius, he grasped feverishly at the succour of God and the Church, he abased himself before the immaculate

purity of the Virgin. He had not, like others who have risen from the same depths to the same height of humiliation, to despoil his nature of its pride, to conquer his intellect before he could become *l'enfant vêtu de laine et d'innocence*. All that was simple, humble, childlike in him accepted that humiliation with the loving child's joy in penitence; all that was ardent, impulsive, indomitable in him burst at once into a flame of adoration.

He realised the great secret of the Christian mystics: that it is possible to love God with an extravagance of the whole being, to which the love of the creature cannot attain. All love is an attempt to break through the loneliness of individuality, to fuse oneself with something not oneself, to give and to receive, in all the warmth of natural desire, that inmost element which remains, so cold and so invincible, in the midst of the soul. It is a desire of the infinite in humanity, and, as humanity has its limits, it can but return sadly upon itself when that limit is reached. Thus human love is not only an ecstasy but a despair, and the more profound a despair the more ardently it is returned.

But the love of God, considered only from its human aspect, contains at least the illusion of infinity. To love God is to love the absolute, so far as the mind of man can conceive the absolute, and thus, in a sense, to love God is to possess the absolute, for love has already possessed that which it apprehends. What the earthly lover realises to himself as the image of his beloved is, after all, his own vision of love, not her. God must remain *deus absconditus*, even to love; but the lover, incapable of possessing infinity, will have possessed all of infinity of which he is capable. And his ecstasy will be flawless. The human mind, meditating on infinity, can but discover perfection beyond per-

fection; for it is impossible to conceive of limitation in any aspect of that which has once been conceived as infinite. In place of that deception which comes from the shock of a boundary-line beyond which humanity cannot conceive of humanity, there is only a divine rage against the limits of human perception, which by their own failure seem at last to limit for us the infinite itself. For once, love finds itself bounded only by its own capacity; so far does the love of God exceed the love of the creature, and so far would it exceed that love if God did not exist.

But if he does exist! if, outside humanity, a conscient, eternal perfection, who has made the world in his image, loves the humanity he has made, and demands love in return! If the spirit of his love is as a breath over the world, suggesting, strengthening, the love which it desires, seeking man that man may seek God, itself the impulse which it humbles itself to accept at man's hands; if, indeed,

Mon Dieu m'a dit: mon fils, il faut m'aimer;

how much more is this love of God, in its inconceivable acceptance and exchange, the most divine, the only unending, intoxication in the world! Well, it is this realised sense of communion, point by point realised, and put into words, more simple, more human, more instinctive than any poet since the mediæval mystics has found for the delights of this intercourse, that we find in *Sagesse*, and in the other religious poems of Verlaine.

But, with Verlaine, the love of God is not merely a rapture, it is a thanksgiving for forgiveness. Lying in wait behind all the fair appearances of the world, he remembers the old enemy, the flesh; and the sense of sin (that strange paradox of the reason) is childishly strong in him. He laments his

offence, he sees not only the love but the justice of God, and it seems to him, as in a picture, that the little hands of the Virgin are clasped in petition for him. Verlaine's religion is the religion of the Middle Ages. *Je suis catholique*, he said to me, *mais . . . catholique du moyen-âge !* He might have written the ballad which Villon made for his mother, and with the same visual sense of heaven and hell. Like a child, he tells his sins over, promises that he has put them behind him, and finds such *naïve*, human words to express his gratitude. The Virgin is really, to him, mother and friend; he delights in the simple, peasant humanity, still visible in her who is also the Mystical Rose, the Tower of Ivory, the Gate of Heaven, and who now extends her hands, in the gesture of pardon, from a throne only just lower than the throne of God.

iv

Experience, I have said, taught Verlaine nothing; religion had no more stable influence upon his conduct than experience. In that apology for himself which he wrote under the anagram of "Pauvre Lelian," he has stated the case with his usual sincerity. "I believe," he says, "and I sin in thought as in action; I believe, and I repent in thought, if no more. Or again, I believe, and I am a good Christian at this moment; I believe, and I am a bad Christian the instant after. The remembrance, the hope, the invocation of a sin delights me, with or without remorse, sometimes under the very form of sin, and hedged with all its natural consequences; more often—so strong, so natural and *animal*, are flesh and blood—just in the same manner as the remembrances, hopes, invocations of any carnal freethinker. This delight, I, you, someone else, writers, it pleases us to put

to paper and publish more or less well expressed: we consign it, in short, into literary form, forgetting all religious ideas, or not letting one of them escape us. Can anyone in good faith condemn us as poet? A hundred times no." And, indeed, I would echo, a hundred times no! It is just this apparent complication of what is really a great simplicity which gives its singular value to the poetry of Verlaine, permitting it to sum up in itself the whole paradox of humanity, and especially the weak, passionate, uncertain, troubled century to which we belong, in which so many doubts, negations, and distresses seem, now more than ever, to be struggling towards at least an ideal of spiritual consolation. Verlaine is the poet of these weaknesses and of that ideal.

JULES LAFORGUE

JULES LAFORGUE was born at Montevideo, of Breton parents, August 20, 1860. He died in Paris in 1887, two days before his twenty-seventh birthday. From 1880 to 1886 he had been reader to the Empress Augusta at Berlin. He married only a few months before his death. *D'allures?* says M. Gustave Kahn, *fort correctes, de hauts gibus, des cravates sobres, des vestons anglais, des pardessus clergymans, et de par les nécessités, un parapluie immuablement placé sous le bras.* His portraits show us a clean-shaved, reticent face, betraying little. With such a personality anecdotes have but small chance of appropriating those details by which expansive natures express themselves to the world. We know nothing about Laforgue which his work is not better able to tell us, even now that we have all his notes, unfinished fragments, and the letters of an almost virginal *naïveté* which he wrote to the woman whom he was going to marry. His entire work, apart from these additions, is contained in two small volumes, one of prose, the *Moralités Légendaires*, the other of verse, *Les Complaintes, L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*, and a few other pieces, all published during the last three years of his life.

The prose and verse of Laforgue, scrupulously correct, but with a new manner of correctness, owe more than any one has realised to the half-unconscious prose and verse of Rimbaud. Verse and prose are alike a kind of travesty,

making subtle use of colloquialism, slang, neologism, technical terms, for their allusive, their factitious, their reflected meanings, with which one can play, very seriously. The verse is alert, troubled, swaying, deliberately uncertain, hating rhetoric so piously that it prefers, and finds its piquancy in, the ridiculously obvious. It is really *vers libre*, but at the same time correct verse, before *vers libre* had been invented. And it carries, as far as that theory has ever been carried, the theory which demands an instantaneous notation (Whistler, let us say) of the figure or landscape which one has been accustomed to define with such rigorous exactitude. Verse, always elegant, is broken up into a kind of mockery of prose.

Encore un de mes pierrots mort ;
Mort d'un chronique orphelinisme ;
C'était un cœur plein de dandysme
Lunaire, en un drôle de corps ;

he will say to us, with a familiarity of manner, as of one talking languidly, in a low voice, the lips always teased into a slightly bitter smile ; and he will pass suddenly into the ironical lilt of

Hôtel garni
De l'infini,

Sphinx et Joconde
Des défunts mondes ;

and from that into this solemn and smiling end of one of his last poems, his own epitaph, if you will :

Il prit froid l'autre automne,
S'étant attardi vers les peines des cors,
Sur la fin d'un beau jour.
Oh ! ce fut pour vos cors, et ce fut pour l'automne,
Qu'il nous montra qu' " on meurt d'amour ! "

On ne le verra plus aux fêtes nationales,
S'enfermer dans l'Hiſtoire et tirer les verrous,
Il vint trop tard, il eſt reparti sans scandale ;
O vous qui m'écoutez, rentrez chacun chez vous.

The old cadences, the old eloquence, the ingenuous seriousness of poetry, are all banished, on a theory as self-denying as that which permitted Degas to dispense with recognisable beauty in his figures. Here, if ever, is modern verse, verse which dispenses with so many of the privileges of poetry, for an ideal quite of its own. It is, after all, a very self-conscious ideal, becoming artificial through its extreme naturalness ; for in poetry it is not " natural " to say things quite so much in the manner of the moment, with however ironical an intention.

The prose of the *Moralités Légendaires* is perhaps even more of a discovery. Finding its origin, as I have pointed out, in the experimental prose of Rimbaud, it carries that manner to a singular perfection. Disarticulated, abſtract, mathematically lyrical, it gives expression, in its icy ecſtasy, to a very subtle criticism of the universe, with a surprising irony of cosmical vision. We learn from books of mediæval magic that the embraces of the devil are of a coldness so intense that it may be called, by an allowable figure of speech, fiery. Everything may be as ſtrongly its opposite as itself, and that is why this balanced, chill, colloquial ſtyle of Laforgue has, in the paradox of its intensity, the essential heat of the moſt obviously emotional prose. The prose is more patient than the verse, with its more compassionate laughter at universal experience. It can laugh as seriously, as profoundly, as in that graveyard monologue of Hamlet, Laforgue's Hamlet, who, Maeterlinck ventures to say, " is at

moments more Hamlet than the Hamlet of Shakespeare." Let me translate a few sentences from it.

" Perhaps I have still twenty or thirty years to live, and I shall pass that way like the others. Like the others? O Totality, the misery of being there no longer! Ah! I would like to set out to-morrow, and search all through the world for the most adamantine processes of embalming. They, too, were the little people of History, learning to read, trimming their nails, lighting the dirty lamp every evening, in love, gluttonous, vain, fond of compliments, handshakes, and kisses, living on bell-tower gossip, saying, ' What sort of weather shall we have to-morrow? Winter has really come. . . . We have had no plums this year.' Ah! everything is good, if it would not come to an end. And thou, Silence, pardon the Earth ; the little madcap hardly knows what she is doing ; on the day of the great summing-up of consciousness before the Ideal, she will be labelled with a pitiful *idem* in the column of the miniature evolutions of the Unique Evolution, in the column of negligible quantities. . . . To die! Evidently, one dies without knowing it, as, every night, one enters upon sleep. One has no consciousness of the passing of the last lucid thought into sleep, into swooning, into death. Evidently. But to be no more, to be here no more, to be ours no more! Not even to be able, any more, to press against one's human heart, some idle afternoon, the ancient sadness contained in one little chord on the piano! "

In these always " lunar " parodies, *Salomé*, *Lohengrin*, *Fils de Parsifal*, *Persée et Andromède*, each a kind of metaphysical myth, he realises that *la créature va hardiment à être cérébrale, anti-naturelle*, and he has invented these fantastic puppets with an almost Japanese art of spiritual dislocation. They are,

in part, a way of taking one's revenge upon science, by an ironical borrowing of its very terms, which dance in his prose and verse, derisively, at the end of a string.

In his acceptance of the fragility of things as actually a principle of art, Laforgue is a sort of transformed Watteau, showing his disdain for the world which fascinates him, in quite a different way. He has constructed in his own world, lunar and actual, speaking slang and astronomy, with a constant disengaging of the visionary aspect, under which frivolity becomes an escape from the arrogance of a still more temporary mode of being, the world as it appears to the sober majority. He is terribly conscious of daily life, cannot omit, mentally, a single hour of the day; and his flight to the moon is in sheer desperation. He sees what he calls *l'Inconscient* in every gesture, but he cannot see it without these gestures. And he sees, not only as an imposition, but as a conquest, the possibilities for art which come from the sickly modern being, with his clothes, his nerves: the mere fact that he flowers from the soil of his epoch.

It is an art of the nerves, this art of Laforgue, and it is what all art would tend towards if we followed our nerves on all their journeys. There is in it all the restlessness of modern life, the haste to escape from whatever weighs too heavily on the liberty of the moment, that capricious liberty which demands only room enough to hurry itself weary. It is distressingly conscious of the unhappiness of mortality, but it plays, somewhat uneasily, at a disdainful indifference. And it is out of these elements of caprice, fear, contempt, linked together by an embracing laughter, that it makes its existence.

Il n'y a pas de type, il y a la vie, Laforgue replies to those who come to him with classical ideals. *Votre idéal est bien vite magnifiquement submergé*, in life itself, which should form

its own art, an art deliberately ephemeral, with the attaching pathos of passing things. There is a great pity at the root of this art of Laforgue: self-pity, which extends, with the artistic sympathy, through mere clearness of vision, across the world. His laughter, which Maeterlinck has defined so admirably as "the laughter of the soul," is the laughter of Pierrot, more than half a sob, and shaken out of him with a deplorable gesture of the thin arms, thrown wide. He is a metaphysical Pierrot, *Pierrot lunaire*, and it is of abstract notions, the whole science of the unconscious, that he makes his showman's patter. As it is part of his manner not to distinguish between irony and pity, or even belief, we need not attempt to do so. Heine should teach us to understand at least so much of a poet who could not otherwise resemble him less. In Laforgue, sentiment is squeezed out of the world before one begins to play at ball with it.

And so, of the two, he is the more hopeless. He has invented a new manner of being René or Werther: an inflexible politeness towards man, woman, and destiny. He composes love-poems hat in hand, and smiles with an exasperating tolerance before all the transformations of the eternal feminine. He is very conscious of death, but his *blague* of death is, above all things, gentlemanly. He will not permit himself, at any moment, the luxury of dropping the mask: not at any moment.

Read this *Autre Complainte de Lord Pierrot*, with the singular pity of its cruelty, before such an imagined dropping of the mask:

Celle qui doit me mettre au courant de la Femme!
Nous lui dirons d'abord, de mon air le moins froid:
"*La somme des angles d'un triangle, chère âme,*
Est égale à deux droits."

Et si ce cri lui part : " Dieu de Dieu que je t'aime ! "
—" Dieu reconnaîtra les siens." Ou piquée au vif :
—" Mes claviers ont du cœur, tu sera mon seul thème."
Moi : " Tout est relatif."

De tous ses yeux, alors ! se sentant trop banale :
" Ah ! tu ne m'aime pas ; tant d'autres sont jaloux ! "
Et moi, d'un œil qui vers l'Inconscient s'emballe :
" Merci, pas mal ; et vous ? "

" Jouons au plus fidèle ! "—A quoi bon, ô Nature !
" Autant à qui perd gagne." Alors, autre couplet :
—" Ah ! tu te lasseras le premier, j'en suis sûre."
—" Après vous, s'il vous plaît."

Enfin, si, par un soir, elle meurt dans mes livres,
Douce ; feignant de n'en pas croire encor mes yeux,
J'aurai un : " Ah çà, mais, nous avions De Quoi vivre !
C'était donc sérieux ? "

And yet one realises, if one but reads him attentively enough, how much suffering and despair, and resignation to what is, after all, the inevitable, are hidden away under this disguise, and also why this disguise is possible. Laforgue died at twenty-seven : he had been a dying man all his life, and his work has the fatal evasiveness of those who shrink from remembering the one thing which they are unable to forget. Coming as he does after Rimbaud, turning the divination of the other into theories, into achieved results, he is the eternally grown up, mature to the point of self-negation, as the other is the eternal *enfant terrible*. He thinks

intensely about life, seeing what is automatic, pathetically ludicrous in it, almost as one might who has no part in the comedy. He has the double advantage, for his art, of being condemned to death, and of being, in the admirable phrase of Villiers, " one of those who come into the world with a ray of moonlight in their brains."

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

I

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ was one of those who love literature too much to write it except by fragments; in whom the desire of perfection brings its own defeat. With either more or less ambition he would have done more to achieve himself; he was always divided between an absolute aim at the absolute, that is, the unattainable, and a too logical disdain for the compromise by which, after all, literature is literature. Carry the theories of Mallarmé to a practical conclusion, multiply his powers in a direct ratio, and you have Wagner. It is his failure not to be Wagner. And, Wagner having existed, it was for him to be something more, to complete Wagner. Well, not being able to be that, it was a matter of sincere indifference to him whether he left one or two little, limited masterpieces of formal verse and prose, the more or the less. It was "the work" that he dreamed of, the new art, more than a new religion, whose precise form in the world he was never quite able to settle.

Un auteur difficile, in the phrase of M. Catulle Mendès, it has always been to what he himself calls "a labyrinth illuminated by flowers" that Mallarmé has felt it due to their own dignity to invite his readers. To their own dignity, and also

to his. Mallarmé was obscure, not so much because he wrote differently, as because he thought differently, from other people. His mind was elliptical, and, relying with undue confidence on the intelligence of his readers, he emphasised the effect of what was unlike other people in his mind by resolutely ignoring even the links of connection that existed between them. Never having aimed at popularity, he never needed, as most writers need, to make the first advances. He made neither intrusion upon nor concession to those who, after all, were not not obliged to read him. And when he spoke, he considered it neither needful nor seemly to listen in order to hear whether he was heard. To the charge of obscurity he replied, with sufficient disdain, that there are many who do not know how to read—except the newspaper, he adds, in one of those disconcerting, oddly-printed parentheses, which make his work, to those who rightly apprehend it, so full of wise limitations, so safe from hasty or seemingly final conclusions. No one in our time has more significantly vindicated the supreme right of the artist in the aristocracy of letters; wilfully, perhaps, not always wisely, but nobly, logically. Has not every artist shrunk from that making of himself "a motley to the view," that handing over of his naked soul to the laughter of the multitude? But who, in our time, has wrought so subtle a veil, shining on this side, where the few are, a thick cloud on the other, where are the many? The oracles have always had the wisdom to hide their secrets in the obscurity of many meanings, or of what has seemed meaningless; and might it not, after all, be the finest epitaph for a self-respecting man of letters to be able to say, even after the writing of many books: I have kept my secret, I have not betrayed myself to the multitude?

But to Mallarmé, certainly, there might be applied the significant warning of Rossetti :

Yet woe to thee if once thou yield
Unto the act of doing nought !

After a life of persistent devotion to literature, he has left enough poems to make a single small volume (less, certainly, than a hundred poems in all), a single volume of prose, a few pamphlets, and a prose translation of the poems of Poe. It is because among these there are masterpieces, poems which are among the most beautiful poems written in our time, prose which has all the subtlest qualities of prose, that, quitting the abstract point of view, we are forced to regret the fatal enchantments, fatal for him, of theories which are so greatly needed by others, so valuable for our instruction, if we are only a little careful in putting them into practice.

In estimating the significance of Stéphane Mallarmé, it is necessary to take into account not only his verse and prose, but, almost more than these, the Tuesdays of the Rue de Rome, in which he gave himself freely to more than one generation. No one who has ever climbed those four flights of stairs will have forgotten the narrow, homely interior, elegant with a sort of scrupulous Dutch comfort ; the heavy, carved furniture, the tall clock, the portraits, Manet's, Whistler's, on the walls ; the table on which the china bowl, odorous with tobacco, was pushed from hand to hand ; above all, the rocking-chair, Mallarmé's, from which he would rise quietly, to stand leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, while one hand, the hand which did not hold the cigarette, would sketch out one of those familiar gestures : *un peu de prêtre, un peu de danseuse* (in M. Rodenbach's admirable phrase), *avec lesquels il avait l'air chaque fois d'*entrer *dans la*

conversation, comme on entre en scène. One of the best talkers of our time, he was, unlike most other fine talkers, harmonious with his own theories in giving no monologues, in allowing every liberty to his guests, to the conversation; in his perfect readiness to follow the slightest indication, to embroider upon any frame, with any material presented to him. There would have been something almost of the challenge of the improvisatore in this easily moved alertness of mental attitude, had it not been for the singular gentleness with which Mallarmé's intelligence moved, in these considerable feats, with the half-apologetic negligence of the perfect acrobat. He seemed to be no more than brushing the dust off your own ideas, settling, arranging them a little, before he gave them back to you, surprisingly luminous. It was only afterwards that you realised how small had been your own part in the matter, as well as what it meant to have enlightened without dazzling you. But there was always the feeling of comradeship, the comradeship of a master, whom, while you were there at least, you did not question; and that very feeling lifted you, in your own estimation, nearer to art.

Invaluable, it seems to me, those Tuesdays must have been to the young men of two generations who have been making French literature; they were unique, certainly, in the experience of the young Englishman who was always so cordially received there, with so flattering a cordiality. Here was a house in which art, literature, was the very atmosphere, a religious atmosphere; and the master of the house, in his just a little solemn simplicity, a priest. I never heard the price of a book mentioned, or the number of thousand francs which a popular author had been paid for his last volume; here, in this one literary house, literature was unknown as a trade. And, above all, the questions

that were discussed were never, at least, in Mallarmé's treatment, in his guidance of them, other than essential questions, considerations of art in the abstract, of literature before it coagulates into a book, of life as its amusing and various web spins the stuff of art. When, indeed, the conversation, by some untimely hazard, drifted too near to one, became for a moment, perhaps inconveniently, practical, it was Mallarmé's solicitous politeness to wait, a little constrained, almost uneasy, rolling his cigarette in silence, until the disturbing moment had passed.

There were other disturbing moments, sometimes. I remember one night, rather late, the sudden irruption of M. de Heredia, coming on after a dinner-party, and seating himself, in his well-filled evening dress, precisely in Mallarmé's favourite chair. He was intensely amusing, voluble, floridly vehement; Mallarmé, I am sure, was delighted to see him; but the loud voice was a little trying to his nerves, and then he did not know what to do without his chair. He was like a cat that has been turned out of its favourite corner, as he roamed uneasily about the room, resting an unaccustomed elbow on the sideboard, visibly at a disadvantage.

For the attitude of those young men, some of them no longer exactly young, who frequented the Tuesdays, was certainly the attitude of the disciple. Mallarmé never exacted it, he seemed never to notice it; yet it meant to him, all the same, a good deal; as it meant, and in the best sense, a good deal to them. He loved art with a supreme disinterestedness, and it was for the sake of art that he wished to be really a master. For he knew that he had something to teach, that he had found out some secrets worth knowing, that he had discovered a point of view which he could to some degree perpetuate in those young

men who listened to him. And to them this free kind of apprenticeship was, beyond all that it gave in direct counsels, in the pattern of work, a noble influence. Mallarmé's quiet, laborious life was for some of them the only counterpoise to the Bohemian example of the *d'Harcourt* or the *Taverne*, where art is loved, but with something of haste, in a very changing devotion. It was impossible to come away from Mallarmé's without some tranquillising influence from that quiet place, some impersonal ambition towards excellence, the resolve, at least, to write a sonnet, a page of prose, that should be in its own way as perfect as one could make it, worthy of Mallarmé.

ii

"Poetry," said Mallarmé, "is the language of a state of crisis"; and all his poems are the evocation of a passing ecstasy, arrested in mid-flight. This ecstasy is never the mere instinctive cry of the heart, the simple human joy or sorrow, which, like the Parnassians, but for not quite the same reason, he did not admit in poetry. It is a mental transposition of emotion or sensation, veiled with atmosphere, and becoming, as it becomes a poem, pure beauty. Here, for instance, in a poem which I have translated line for line, and almost word for word, a delicate emotion, a figure vaguely divined, a landscape magically evoked, blend in a single effect.

SIGH

My soul, calm sister, towards thy brow, whereon scarce grieves
An autumn strewn already with its russet leaves,
And towards the wandering sky of thine angelic eyes,
Mounts, as in melancholy gardens may arise

Some faithful fountain sighing whitely towards the blue !
—Towards the blue pale and pure that sad October knew,
When, in those depths, it mirrored langours infinite,
And agonising leaves upon the waters white,
Windily drifting, traced a furrow cold and dun,
Where, in one long last ray, lingered the yellow sun.

Another poem comes a little closer to nature, but with what exquisite precautions, and with what surprising novelty in its unhesitating touch on actual things !

SEA-WIND

The flesh is sad, alas ! and all the books are read.
Flight, only flight ! I feel that birds are wild to tread
The floor of unknown foam, and to attain the skies !
Nought, neither ancient gardens mirrored in the eyes,
Shall hold this heart that bathes in waters its delight,
O nights ! nor yet my waking lamp, whose lonely light
Shadows the vacant paper, whiteness profits best,
Nor the young wife who rocks her baby on her breast.
I will depart. O steamer, swaying rope and spar,
Lift anchor for exotic lands that lie afar !
A weariness, outworn by cruel hopes, still clings
To the last farewell handkerchief's last beckonings !
And are not these, the masts inviting storms, not these
That an awakening wind bends over wrecking seas,
Lost, not a sail, a sail, a flowering isle, ere long ?
But, O my heart, hear thou, hear thou the sailors' song !

These (need I say ?) belong to the earlier period, in which Mallarmé had not yet withdrawn his light into the cloud; and to the same period belong the prose-poems, one of which, perhaps the most exquisite, I will translate here.

" AUTUMN LAMENT

" Ever since Maria left me, for another star—which ? Orion, Altair, or thou, green Venus ?—I have always cherished solitude. How many long days I have passed, alone with my cat ! By *alone*, I mean without a material being, and my cat is a mystical companion, a spirit. I may say, then, that I have passed long days alone with my cat, and alone, with one of the last writers of the Roman decadence ; for since the white creature is no more, strangely and singularly, I have loved all that may be summed up in the word : fall. Thus, in the year, my favourite season is during those last languid summer days which come just before the autumn ; and, in the day, the hour when I take my walk is the hour when the sun lingers before fading, with rays of copper-yellow on the grey walls, and of copper-red on the window-panes. And, just so, the literature from which my soul demands delight must be the poetry dying out of the last moments of Rome, provided, nevertheless, that it breathes nothing of the rejuvenating approach of the Barbarians, and does not stammer the infantile Latin of the first Christian prose.

" I read, then, one of those beloved poems (whose streaks of rouge have more charm for me than the fresh cheek of youth), and buried my hand in the fur of the pure animal, when a barrel-organ began to sing, languishingly and melancholy, under my window. It played in the long alley of poplars, whose leaves seem mournful to me even in spring, since Maria passed that way with the tapers, for the last time. Yes, sad people's instrument, truly : the piano glitters, the violin brings one's torn fibres to the light, but the barrel-organ, in the twilight of memory, has set me

despairingly dreaming. While it murmured a gaily vulgar air, such as puts mirth into the heart of the suburbs, an old-fashioned, an empty air, how came it that its refrain went to my very soul, and made me weep like a romantic ballad? I drank it in, and I did not throw a penny out of the window, for fear of disturbing my own impression, and of perceiving that the instrument was not singing by itself."

Between these characteristic, clear, and beautiful poems, in verse and in prose, and the opaque darkness of the later writings, come one or two poems, perhaps the finest of all, in which already clearness is "a secondary grace," but in which a subtle rapture finds incomparable expression. *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* and *Hérodiade* have already been introduced, in different ways, to English readers: the former by Mr. Gosse, in a detailed analysis; the latter by a translation into verse. And Debussy, in his new music, has taken *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* almost for his new point of departure, interpreting it, at all events, faultlessly. In these two poems I find Mallarmé at the moment when his own desire achieves itself; when he attains Wagner's ideal, that "the most complete work of the poet should be that which, in its final achievement, becomes a perfect music": every word is a jewel, scattering and recapturing sudden fire, every image is a symbol, and the whole poem is visible music. After this point began that fatal "last period" which comes to most artists who have thought too curiously, or dreamed too remote dreams, or followed a too wandering beauty. Mallarmé had long been too conscious that all publication is "almost a speculation, on one's modesty, for one's silence"; that "to unclench the fists, breaking one's sedentary dream, for a ruffling face to face with the idea," was after all unnecessary to his own conception of himself, a mere way of

convincing the public that one exists ; and having achieved, as he thought, " the right to abstain from doing anything exceptional," he devoted himself, doubly, to silence. Seldom condescending to write, he wrote now only for himself, and in a manner which certainly saved him from intrusion. Some of Meredith's poems, and occasional passages of his prose, can alone give in English some faint idea of the later prose and verse of Mallarmé. The verse could not, I think, be translated ; of the prose, in which an extreme lucidity of thought comes to us but glimmeringly through the entanglements of a construction, part Latin, part English, I shall endeavour to translate some fragments, in speaking of the theoretic writings, contained in the two volumes of *Vers et Prose* and *Divagations*.

iii

It is the distinction of Mallarmé to have aspired after an impossible liberation of the soul of literature from what is fretting and constraining in " the body of that death," which is the mere literature of words. Words, he has realised, are of value only as a notation of the free breath of the spirit ; words, therefore, must be employed with an extreme care, in their choice and adjustment, in setting them to reflect and chime upon one another ; yet least of all for their own sake, for what they can never, except by suggestion, express. " Every soul is a melody," he has said, " which needs to be readjusted ; and for that are the flute or viol of each." The word, treated indeed with a kind of " adoration," as he says, is so regarded in a magnificent sense, in which it is apprehended as a living thing, itself the vision rather than the reality ; at least the philtre of the evocation. The word,

chosen as he chooses it, is for him a liberating principle, by which the spirit is extracted from matter; takes form, perhaps assumes immortality. Thus an artificiality, even, in the use of words, that seeming artificiality which comes from using words as if they had never been used before, that chimerical search after the virginity of language, is but the paradoxical outward sign of an extreme discontent with even the best of their service. Writers who use words fluently, seeming to disregard their importance, do so from an unconscious confidence in their expressiveness, which the scrupulous thinker, the precise dreamer, can never place in the most carefully chosen among them. To evoke, by some elaborate, instantaneous magic of language, without the formality of an after all impossible description; to be, rather than to express: that is what Mallarmé has consistently, and from the first, sought in verse and prose. And he has sought this wandering, illusive, beckoning butterfly, the soul of dreams, over more and more entangled ground; and it has led him into the depths of many forests, far from the sunlight. To say that he has found what he sought is impossible; but (is it possible to avoid saying?) how heroic a search, and what marvellous discoveries by the way!

I think I understand, though I cannot claim his own authority for my supposition, the way in which Mallarmé wrote verse, and the reason why it became more and more abstruse, more and more unintelligible. Remember his principle: that to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create. Note, further, that he condemns the inclusion in verse of anything but, "for example, the horror of the forest, or the silent thunder afloat in the leaves; not the intrinsic, dense wood of the trees." He has received, then, a mental sensation: let it be the horror of the forest. This sensation begins

to form in his brain, at first probably no more than a rhythm, absolutely without words. Gradually thought begins to concentrate itself (but with an extreme care, lest it should break the tension on which all depends) upon the sensation, already struggling, to find its own consciousness. Delicately, stealthily, with infinitely timid precaution, words present themselves, at first in silence. Every word seems like a desecration, seems, the clearer it is, to throw back the original sensation farther and farther into the darkness. But, guided always by the rhythm, which is the executive soul (as, in Aristotle's definition, the soul is the form of the body), words come slowly, one by one, shaping the message. Imagine the poem already written down, at least composed. In its very imperfection, it is clear, it shows the links by which it has been riveted together; the whole process of its construction can be studied. Now most writers would be content; but with Mallarmé the work has only begun. In the final result there must be no sign of the making, there must be only the thing made. He works over it, word by word, changing a word here, for its colour, which is not precisely the colour required, a word there, for the break it makes in the music. A new image occurs to him, rarer, subtler, than the one he has used; the image is transferred. By the time the poem has reached, as it seems to him, a flawless unity, the steps of the progress have been only too effectually effaced; and while the poet, who has seen the thing from the beginning, still sees the relation of point to point, the reader, who comes to it only in its final stage, finds himself in a not unnatural bewilderment. Pursue this manner of writing to its ultimate development; start with an enigma, and then withdraw the key of the enigma; and you arrive, easily, at the frozen impenetrability of those

latest sonnets, in which the absence of all punctuation is scarcely a recognisable hindrance.

That, I fancy to myself, was his actual way of writing; here, in what I prefer to give as a corollary, is the theory. "Symbolist, Decadent, or Mystic, the schools thus called by themselves, or thus hastily labelled by our information-press, adopt, for meeting-place, the point of an Idealism which (similarly as in fugues, in sonatas) rejects the 'natural' materials, and, as brutal, a direct thought ordering them; to retain no more than suggestion. To be instituted, a relation between images, exact; and that therefrom should detach itself a third aspect, fusible and clear, offered to the divination. Abolished, the pretension, æsthetically an error, despite its dominion over almost all the masterpieces, to enclose within the subtle paper other than, for example, the horror of the forest, or the silent thunder afloat in the leaves; not the intrinsic, dense wood of the trees. Some few bursts of personal pride, veridically trumpeted, awaken the architecture of the palace, alone habitable; not of stone, on which the pages would close but ill." For example (it is his own): "I say: a flower! and out of the oblivion to which my voice consigns every contour, so far as anything save the known calyx, musically arises, idea, and exquisite, the one flower absent from all bouquets." "The pure work," then, "implies the elocutionary disappearance of the poet, who yields place to the words, immobilised by the shock of their inequality; they take light from mutual reflection, like an actual trail of fire over precious stones, replacing the old lyric afflatus or the enthusiastic personal direction of the phrase." "The verse which out of many vocables remakes an entire word, new, unknown to the language, and as if magical, attains this isolation of speech." Whence, it being

" music which rejoins verse, to form, since Wagner, Poetry," the final conclusion: " That we are now precisely at the moment of seeking, before that breaking up of the large rhythms of literature, and their scattering in articulate, almost instrumental, nervous waves, an art which shall complete the transposition, into the Book, of the symphony, or simply recapture our own: for, it is not in elementary sonorities of brass, strings, wood, unquestionably, but in the intellectual word at its utmost, that, fully and evidently, we should find, drawing to itself all the correspondences of the universe, the supreme Music."

Here, literally translated, in exactly the arrangement of the original, are some passages out of the theoretic writings, which I have brought together, to indicate what seem to me the main lines of Mallarmé's doctrine. It is the doctrine which, as I have already said, had been divined by Gérard de Nerval; but what, in Gérard, was pure vision, becomes in Mallarmé a logical sequence of meditation. Mallarmé was not a mystic, to whom anything came unconsciously; he was a thinker, in whom an extraordinary subtlety of mind was exercised on always explicit, though by no means the common, problems. " A seeker after something in the world, that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all," he pursued his search with unwearying persistence, with a sharp mental division of dream and idea, certainly very lucid to himself, however he may have failed to render his expression clear to others. And I, for one, cannot doubt that he was, for the most part, entirely right in his statement and analysis of the new conditions under which we are now privileged or condemned to write. His obscurity was partly his failure to carry out the spirit of his own directions; but, apart from obscurity, which we may all be fortunate

enough to escape, is it possible for a writer, at the present day, to be quite simple, with the old, objective simplicity, in either thought or expression? To be *naïf*, to be archaic, is not to be either natural or simple; I affirm that it is not natural to be what is called "natural" any longer. We have no longer the mental attitude of those to whom a story was but a story, and all stories good; we have realised, since it was proved to us by Poe, not merely that the age of epics is past, but that no long poem was ever written; the finest long poem in the world being but a series of short poems linked together by prose. And, naturally, we can no longer write what we can no longer accept. Symbolism, implicit in all literature from the beginning, as it is implicit in the very words we use, comes to us now, at last quite conscious of itself, offering us the only escape from our many imprisonments. We find a new, an older, sense in the so worn out forms of things; the world, which we can no longer believe in as the satisfying material object it was to our grandparents, becomes transfigured with a new light; words, which long usage had darkened almost out of recognition, take fresh lustre. And it is on the lines of that spiritualising of the word, that perfecting of form in its capacity for allusion and suggestion, that confidence in the eternal correspondences between the visible and the invisible universe, which Mallarmé taught, and too intermittently practised, that literature must now move, if it is in any sense to move forward.

THE LATER HUYSMANS

IN the preface to his first novel, *Marthe : histoire d'une fille*, thirty years ago, Huysmans defined his theory of art in this defiant phrase : " I write what I see, what I feel, and what I have experienced, and I write it as well as I can : that is all." Ten or twelve years ago, he could still say, in answer to an interviewer who asked him his opinion of Naturalism : " At bottom, there are writers who have talent and others who have not ; let them be Naturalists, Romantics, Decadents, what you will, it is all the same to me : I only want to know if they have talent." Such theoretical liberality, in a writer of original talent, is a little disconcerting : it means that he is without a theory of his own, that he is not yet conscious of having chosen his own way. And, indeed, it is only with *En Route* that Huysmans can be said to have discovered the direction in which he had really been travelling from the beginning.

In a preface written not long since for a limited edition of *A Rebours*, Huysmans confessed that he had never been conscious of the direction in which he was travelling. " My life and my literature," he affirmed, " have undoubtedly a certain amount of passivity, of the incalculable, of a direction not mine. I have simply obeyed ; I have been led by what are called ' mysterious ways.' " He is speaking of the conversion which took him to La Trappe in 1892, but the words apply to the whole course of his career as a man of

letters. In *Là-Bas*, which is a sort of false start, he had, indeed, realised, though for himself at that time ineffectually, that " it is essential to preserve the veracity of the document, the precision of detail, the fibrous and nervous language of Realism, but it is equally essential to become the well-digger of the soul, and not to attempt to explain what is mysterious by mental maladies. . . . It is essential, in a word, to follow the great road so deeply dug out by Zola, but it is necessary also to trace a parallel pathway in the air, and to grapple with the within and the after, to create, in a word, a spiritual Naturalism." This is almost a definition of the art of *En Route*, where this spiritual realism is applied to the history of a soul, a conscience ; in *La Cathédrale* the method has still further developed, and Huysmans becomes, in his own way, a Symbolist.

To the student of psychology few more interesting cases could be presented than the development of Huysmans. From the first he has been a man " for whom the visible world existed," indeed, but as the scene of a slow martyrdom. The world has always appeared to him to be a profoundly uncomfortable, unpleasant, and ridiculous place ; and it has been a necessity of his temperament to examine it minutely, with all the patience of disgust, and a necessity of his method to record it with an almost ecstatic hatred. In his first book, *Le Drageoir à Epices*, published at the age of twenty-six, we find him seeking his colour by preference in a drunkard's cheek or a carcase outside a butcher's shop. *Marthe*, published at Brussels in 1876, anticipates *La Fille Elisa* and *Nana*, but it has a crude brutality of observation in which there is hardly a touch of pity. *Les Sœurs Vatard* is a frame without a picture, but in *En Menage* the dreary tedium of existence is chronicled in all its insignificance with

a kind of weary and aching hate. "We, too," is its conclusion, "by leave of the everlasting stupidity of things, may, like our fellow-citizens, live stupid and respected." The fantastic unreality, the exquisite artificiality of *A Rebours*, the breviary of the decadence, is the first sign of that possible escape which Huysmans has always foreseen in the direction of art, but which he is still unable to make into more than an artificial paradise, in which beauty turns to a cruel hallucination and imprisons the soul still more fatally. The end is a cry of hopeless hope, in which Huysmans did not understand the meaning till later: "Lord, have pity of the Christian who doubts, of the sceptic who would fain believe, of the convict of life who sets sail alone by night, under a firmament lighted only by the consoling watch-lights of the old hope."

In *Là-Bas* we are in yet another stage of this strange pilgrim's progress. The disgust which once manifested itself in the merely external revolt against the ugliness of streets, the imbecility of faces, has become more and more internalised, and the attraction of what is perverse in the unusual beauty of art has led, by some obscure route, to the perilous halfway house of a corrupt mysticism. The book, with its monstrous pictures of the Black Mass and of the spiritual abominations of Satanism, is one step further in the direction of the supernatural; and this, too, has its desperate, unlooked-for conclusion: "Christian glory is a laughing-stock to our age; it contaminates the supernatural and casts out the world to come." In *Là-Bas* we go down into the deepest gulf; *En Route* sets us one stage along a new way, and at this turning-point begins the later Huysmans.

The old conception of the novel as an amusing tale of adventures, though it has still its apologists in England, has long since ceased in France to mean anything more actual

than powdered wigs and lace ruffles. Like children who cry to their elders for "a story, a story," the English public still wants its plot, its heroine, its villain. That the novel should be psychological was a discovery as early as Benjamin Constant, whose *Adolphe* anticipates *Le Rouge et le Noir*, that rare, revealing, yet somewhat arid masterpiece of Stendhal. But that psychology could be carried so far into the darkness of the soul, that the flaming walls of the world themselves faded to a glimmer, was a discovery which had been made by no novelist before Huysmans wrote *En Route*. At once the novel showed itself capable of competing, on their own ground, with poetry, with the great "confessions," with philosophy. *En Route* is perhaps the first novel which does not set out with the aim of amusing its readers. It offers you no more entertainment than *Paradise Lost* or the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, and it is possible to consider it on the same level. The novel, which, after having chronicled the adventures of the Vanity Fairs of this world, has set itself with admirable success to analyse the amorous and ambitious and money-making intelligence of the conscious and practical self, sets itself at last to the final achievement: the revelation of the sub-conscious self, no longer the intelligence, but the soul. Here, then, purged of the distraction of incident, liberated from the bondage of a too realistic conversation, in which the aim had been to convey the very gesture of breathing life, internalised to a complete liberty, in which, just because it is so absolutely free, art is able to accept, without limiting itself, the expressive medium of a convention, we have in the novel a new form, which may be at once a confession and a decoration, the soul and a pattern.

This story of a conversion is a new thing in modern French; it is a confession, a self-auscultation of the soul;

a kind of thinking aloud. It fixes, in precise words, all the uncertainties, the contradictions, the absurd unreasonableness and not less absurd logic, which distract man's brain in the passing over him of sensation and circumstance. And all this thinking is concentrated on one end, is concerned with the working out, in his own singular way, of one man's salvation. There is a certain dry hard casuistry, a subtlety and closeness almost ecclesiastical, in the investigation of an obscure and yet definite region, whose intellectual passions are as varied and as tumultuous as those of the heart. Every step is taken deliberately, is weighed, approved, condemned, viewed from this side and from that, and at the same time one feels behind all this reasoning an impulsion urging a soul onward against its will. In this astonishing passage, through Satanism to faith, in which the cry, "I am so weary of myself, so sick of my miserable existence," echoes through page after page, until despair dies into conviction, the conviction of "the uselessness of concerning oneself about anything but mysticism and the liturgy, of thinking about anything but about God," it is impossible not to see the sincerity of an actual, unique experience. The force of mere curiosity can go far, can penetrate to a certain depth; yet there is a point at which mere curiosity, even that of genius, comes to an end; and we are left to the individual soul's apprehension of what seems to it the reality of spiritual things. Such a personal apprehension comes to us out of this book, and at the same time, just as in the days when he forced language to express, in a more coloured and pictorial way than it had ever expressed before, the last escaping details of material things, so, in this analysis of the aberrations and warfares, the confessions and trials of the soul in penitence, Huysmans has found words for even the most subtle and

illusive aspects of that inner life which he has come, at the last, to apprehend.

In *La Cathédrale* we are still occupied with this sensitive, lethargic, persevering soul, but with that soul in one of its longest halts by the way, as it undergoes the slow, permeating influence of "*la Cathédrale mystique par excellence*," the cathedral of Chartres. And the greater part of the book is taken up with a study of this cathedral, of that elaborate and profound symbolism by which "the soul of sanctuaries" slowly reveals itself (*quel laconisme hermétique !*) with a sort of parallel interpretation of the symbolism which the Church of the Middle Ages concealed or revealed in colours, precious stones, plants, animals, numbers, odours, and in the Bible itself, in the setting together of the Old and New Testaments.

No doubt, to some extent this book is less interesting than *En Route*, in the exact proportion in which everything in the world is less interesting than the human soul. There are times when Durtal is almost forgotten, and, unjustly enough, it may seem as if we are given this archæology, these bestiaries, for their own sake. To fall into this error is to mistake the whole purpose of the book, the whole extent of the discovery in art which Huysmans has been one of the first to make.

For in *La Cathédrale* Huysmans does but carry further the principle which he had perceived in *En Route*, showing, as he does, how inert matter, the art of stones, the growth of plants, the unconscious life of beasts, may be brought under the same law of the soul, may obtain, through symbol, a spiritual existence. He is thus but extending the domain of the soul while he may seem to be limiting or ignoring it; and Durtal may well stand aside for a moment, in at least the energy of contemplation, while he sees, with a

new understanding, the very sight of his eyes, the very stuff of his thoughts, taking life before him, a life of the same substance as his own. What is Symbolism if not an establishing of the links which hold the world together, the affirmation of an eternal, minute, intricate, almost invisible life, which runs through the whole universe? Every age has its own symbols; but a symbol once perfectly expressed, that symbol remains, as Gothic architecture remains the very soul of the Middle Ages. To get at that truth which is all but the deepest meaning of beauty, to find that symbol which is its most adequate expression, is in itself a kind of creation; and that is what Huysmans does for us in *La Cathédrale*. More and more he has put aside all the profane and accessible and outward pomp of writing for an inner and more severe beauty of perfect truth. He has come to realise that truth can be reached and revealed only by symbol. Hence, all that description, that heaping up of detail, that passionately patient elaboration: all means to an end, not, as you may hastily incline to think, ends in themselves.

It is curious to observe how often an artist perfects a particular means of expression long before he has any notion of what to do with it. Huysmans began by acquiring so astonishing a mastery of description that he could describe the inside of a cow hanging in a butcher's shop as beautifully as if it were a casket of jewels. The little work-girls of his early novels were taken for long walks, in which they would have seen nothing but the arm on which they lent and the milliners' shops which they passed; and what they did not see was described, marvellously, in twenty pages.

Huysmans is a brain all eye, a brain which sees even ideas as if they had a superficies. His style is always the same, whether he writes of a butcher's shop or of a stained-glass

window ; it is the immediate expression of a way of seeing, so minute and so intense that it becomes too emphatic for elegance and too coloured for atmosphere or composition, always ready to sacrifice euphony to either fact or colour. He cares only to give you the thing seen, exactly as he sees it, with all his love or hate, and with all the exaggeration which that feeling brings into it. And he loves beauty as a bulldog loves its mistress : by growling at all her enemies. He honours wisdom by annihilating stupidity. His art of painting in words resembles Monet's art of painting with his brush : there is the same power of rendering a vivid effect, almost deceptively, with a crude and yet sensitive realism. "*C'est pour la gourmandise de l'œil un gala de teintes*," he says of the provision cellars at Hamburg ; and this greed of the eye has eaten up in him almost every other sense. Even of music he writes as a deaf man with an eye for colour might write, to whom a musician had explained certain technical means of expression in music. No one has ever invented such barbarous and exact metaphors for the rendering of visual sensations. Properly, there is no metaphor ; the words say exactly what they mean ; they become figurative, as we call it, in their insistence on being themselves fact.

Huysmans knows that the motive force of the sentence lies in the verbs, and his verbs are the most singular, precise, and expressive in any language. But in subordinating, as he does, every quality to that of sharp, telling truth, the truth of extremes, his style loses charm ; yet it can be dazzling ; it has the solidity of those walls encrusted with gems which are to be seen in a certain chapel in Prague ; it blazes with colour, and arabesques into a thousand fantastic patterns.

And now all that laboriously acquired mastery finds at last its use, lending itself to the new spirit with a wonderful

docility. At last the idea which is beyond reality has been found, not where des Esseintes sought it, and a new meaning comes into what had once been scarcely more than patient and wrathful observation. The idea is there, visible, in his cathedral, like the sun which flashes into unity, into meaning, into intelligible beauty, the bewildering lozenges of colour, the inextricable trails of lead, which go to make up the picture in one of its painted windows. What, for instance, could be more precise in its translation of the different aspects under which the cathedral of Chartres can be seen, merely as colour, than this one sentence: "Seen as a whole, under a clear sky, its grey silvers, and, if the sun shines upon it, turns pale yellow and then golden; seen close, its skin is like that of a nibbled biscuit, with its siliceous limestone eaten into holes; sometimes, when the sun is setting, it turns crimson, and rises up like a monstrous and delicate shrine, rose and green; and, at twilight, turns blue, then seems to evaporate as it fades into violet." Or, again, in a passage which comes nearer to the conventional idea of eloquence, how absolute an avoidance of a conventional phrase, a word used for its merely oratorical value: "High up, in space, like salamanders, human beings, with burning faces and flaming robes, lived in a firmament of fire; but these conflagrations were circumscribed, limited by an incombustible frame of darker glass, which beat back the clear young joy of the flames; by that kind of melancholy, that more serious and more aged aspect, which is taken by the duller colours. The hue and cry of reds, the limpid security of whites, the reiterated halleluias of yellows, the virginal glory of blues, all the quivering hearth-glow of painted glass, died away as it came near this border coloured with the rust of iron, with the russet of sauce, with the harsh

violet of sandstone, with bottle-green, with the brown of touch-wood, with sooty black, with ashen grey."

This, in its excess of exactitude (how mediæval a quality!) becomes, on one page, a comparison of the tower without a spire to an unsharpened pencil which cannot write the prayers of earth upon the sky. But for the most part it is a consistent humanising of too objectively visible things, a disengaging of the sentiment which exists in them, which is one of the secrets of their appeal to us, but which for the most part we overlook as we set ourselves to add up the shapes and colours which have enchanted us. To Huysmans this artistic discovery has come, perhaps in the most effectual way, but certainly in the way least probable in these days, through faith, a definite religious faith; so that, beginning tentatively, he has come, at last, to believe in the Catholic Church as a monk of the Middle Ages believed in it. And there is no doubt that to Huysmans this abandonment to religion has brought, among other gifts, a certain human charity in which he was notably lacking, removing at once one of his artistic limitations. It has softened his contempt of humanity; it has broadened his outlook on the world. And the sense diffused through the whole of this book, of the living and beneficent reality of the Virgin, of her real presence in the cathedral built in her honour and after her own image, brings a strange and touching kind of poetry into these closely and soberly woven pages.

From this time forward, until his death, Huysmans is seen purging himself of his realism, coming closer and closer to that spiritual Naturalism which he had invented, an art made out of an apprehension of the inner meaning of those things which he still saw with the old tenacity of vision. Nothing is changed in him and yet all is changed. The

disgust of the world deepens through *L'Oblat*, which is the last stage but one in the pilgrimage which begins with *En Route*. It seeks an escape in poring, with a dreadful diligence, over a saint's recorded miracles, in the life of *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam*, which is mediæval in its precise acceptance of every horrible detail of the story. *Les Foules de Lourdes* has the same minute attentiveness to horror, but with a new pity in it, and a way of giving thanks to the Virgin, which is in Huysmans yet another escape from his disgust of the world. But it is in the great chapter on Satan as the creator of ugliness that his work seems to end where it had begun, in the service of art, now come from a great way off to join itself with the service of God. And the whole soul of Huysmans characterises itself in the turn of a single phrase there: that "art is the only clean thing on earth, except holiness."

MAETERLINCK AS A MYSTIC

THE secret of things which is just beyond the most subtle words, the secret of the expressive silences, has always been clearer to Maeterlinck than to most people; and, in his plays, he has elaborated an art of sensitive, taciturn, and at the same time highly ornamental simplicity, which has come nearer than any other art to being the voice of silence. To Maeterlinck the theatre has been, for the most part, no more than one of the disguises by which he can express himself, and with his book of meditations on the inner life, *Le Trésor des Humbles*, he may seem to have dropped his disguise.

All art hates the vague; not the mysterious, but the vague; two opposites very commonly confused, as the secret with the obscure, the infinite with the indefinite. And the artist who is also a mystic hates the vague with a more profound hatred than any other artist. Thus Maeterlinck, endeavouring to clothe mystical conceptions in concrete form, has invented a drama so precise, so curt, so arbitrary in its limits, that it can safely be confided to the masks and feigned voices of marionettes. His theatre of artificial beings, who are at once more ghostly and more mechanical than the living actors whom we are accustomed to see, in so curious a parody of life, moving with a certain freedom of action across the stage, may be taken as itself a symbol of the aspect under which what we fantastically term "real

life" presents itself to the myſtic. Are we not all puppets, in a theatre of marionettes, in which the parts we play, the dresses we wear, the very emotion whose dominance gives its express form to our faces, have all been chosen for us; in which I, it may be, with curled hair and a Spanish cloak, play the romantic lover, sorely againſt my will, while you, a "fair penitent" for no repented sin, pass whitely under a nun's habit? And as our parts have been chosen for us, our motions controlled from behind the curtain, so the words we seem to speak are but spoken through us, and we do but utter fragments of some elaborate invention, planned for larger ends than our personal display or convenience, but to which, all the same, we are in a humble degree necessary. This symbolical theatre, its very exiſtence being a symbol, has perplexed many minds, to some of whom it has seemed puerile, a child's myſtification of small words and repetitions, a thing of attitudes and omissions; while others, yet more unwisely, have compared it with the violent, rhetorical, moſt human drama of the Elizabethans, with Shakespeare himself, to whom all the world was a ſtage, and the ſtage all this world, certainly. A sentence, already famous, of the *Trésor des Humbles*, will tell you what it signifies to Maeterlinck himself.

"I have come to believe," he writes, in *Le Tragique Quotidien*, "that an old man seated in his armchair, waiting quietly under the lamplight, liſtening without knowing it to all the eternal laws which reign about his house, interpreting without underſtanding it all that there is in the silence of doors and windows, and in the little voice of light, enduring the presence of his soul and of his deſtiny, bowing his head a little, without ſuſpecting that all the powers of the earth intervene and ſtand on guard in the room like attentive

servants, not knowing that the sun itself suspends above the abyss the little table on which he rests his elbow, and that there is not a star in the sky nor a force in the soul which is indifferent to the motion of a falling eyelid or a rising thought —I have come to believe that this motionless old man lived really a more profound, human, and universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who gains a victory, or the husband who 'avenges his honour.'"

That, it seems to me, says all there is to be said of the intention of this drama which Maeterlinck has evoked; and, of its style, this other sentence, which I take from the same essay: "It is only the words that at first sight seem useless which really count in a work."

This drama, then, is a drama founded on philosophical ideas, apprehended emotionally; on the sense of the mystery of the universe, of the weakness of humanity, that sense which Pascal expressed when he said: *Ce qui m'étonne le plus est de voir que tout le monde n'est pas étonné de sa faiblesse*; with an acute feeling of the pathetic ignorance in which the souls nearest to one another look out upon their neighbours. It is a drama in which the interest is concentrated on vague people, who are little parts of the universal consciousness, their strange names being but the pseudonyms of obscure passions, intimate emotions. They have the fascination which we find in the eyes of certain pictures, so much more real and disquieting, so much more permanent with us, than living people. And they have the touching simplicity of children; they are always children in their ignorance of themselves, of one another, and of fate. And, because they are so disembodied of the more trivial accidents of life, they give themselves without limitation to whatever passionate instinct possesses them. I do not know a more

passionate love-scene than that scene in the wood beside the fountain, where Pelléas and Mélisande confess the strange burden which has come upon them. When the soul gives itself absolutely to love, all the barriers of the world are burnt away, and all its wisdom and subtlety are as incense poured on a flame. Morality, too, is burnt away, no longer exists, any more than it does for children or for God.

Maeterlinck has realised, better than anyone else, the significance, in life and art, of mystery. He has realised how unsearchable is the darkness out of which we have but just stepped, and the darkness into which we are about to pass. And he has realised how the thought and sense of that twofold darkness invade the little space of light in which, for a moment, we move; the depth to which they shadow our steps, even in that moment's partial escape. But in some of his plays he would seem to have apprehended this mystery as a thing merely or mainly terrifying; the actual physical darkness surrounding blind men, the actual physical approach of death as the intruder; he has shown us people huddled at a window, out of which they are almost afraid to look, or beating at a door, the opening of which they dread. Fear shivers through these plays, creeping across our nerves like a damp mist coiling up out of a valley. And there is beauty, certainly, in this "vague spiritual fear"; but a less obvious kind of beauty than that which gives its profound pathos to *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, the one play written since the writing of the essays. Here is mystery, which is also pure beauty, in these delicate approaches of intellectual pathos, in which suffering and death and error become transformed into something almost happy, so full is it of strange light.

And the aim of Maeterlinck, in his plays, is not only to

render the soul and the soul's atmosphere, but to reveal this ſtrangeness, pity, and beauty through beautiful pictures. No dramatiſt has ever been so careful that his scenes should be in themselves beautiful, or has made the actual space of foreſt, tower, or seashore so emotionally significant. He has realised, after Wagner, that the art of the ſtage is the art of pictorial beauty, of the correspondence in rhythm between the speakers, their words, and their surroundings. He has seen how, in this way, and in this way alone, the emotion, which it is but a part of the poetic drama to express, can be at once intensified and purified.

It is only after hinting at many of the things which he had to say in these plays, which have, after all, been a kind of subterfuge, that Maeterlinck has cared, or been able, to speak with the direct utterance of the essays. And what may seem curious is that this prose of the essays, which is the prose of a doctrine, is incomparably more beautiful than the prose of the plays, which was the prose of an art. Holding on this point a different opinion from one who was, in many senses, his maſter, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, he did not admit that beauty of words, or even any expressed beauty of thoughts, had its place in spoken dialogue, even though it was not two living actors speaking to one another on the ſtage, but a soul speaking to a soul, and imagined speaking through the mouths of marionettes. But that beauty of phrase which makes the profound and sometimes obscure pages of *Axël* shine as with the crossing fire of jewels, rejoices us, though with a softer, a more equable, radiance, in the pages of these essays, in which every sentence has the indwelling beauty of an intellectual emotion, preserved at the same height of tranquil ecſtasy from firſt page to laſt. There is a sort of religious calm in these deliberate sentences, into

which the writer has known how to introduce that divine monotony which is one of the accomplishments of great style. Never has simplicity been more ornate or a fine beauty more visible through its self-concealment.

But, after all, the claim upon us of this book is not the claim of a work of art, but of a doctrine, and more than that, of a system. Belonging, as he does, to the eternal hierarchy, the unbroken succession, of the mystics, Maeterlinck has apprehended what is essential in the mystical doctrine with a more profound comprehension, and thus more systematically, than any mystic of recent times. He has many points of resemblance with Emerson, on whom he has written an essay which is properly an exposition of his own personal ideas; but Emerson, who proclaimed the supreme guidance of the inner light, the supreme necessity of trusting instinct, of honouring emotion, did but proclaim all this, not without a certain anti-mystical vagueness: Maeterlinck has systematised it. A more profound mystic than Emerson, he has greater command of that which comes to him unawares, is less at the mercy of visiting angels.

Also, it may be said that he surrenders himself to them more absolutely, with less reserve and discretion; and, as he has infinite leisure, his contemplation being subject to no limits of time, he is ready to follow them on unknown rounds, to any distance, in any direction, ready also to rest in any wayside inn, without fearing that he will have lost the road on the morrow.

This old gospel, of which Maeterlinck is the new voice, has been quietly waiting until certain bankruptcies, the bankruptcy of Science, of the Positive Philosophies, should allow it full credit. Considering the length even of time,

it has not had an unreasonable space of waiting; and remember that it takes time but little into account. We have seen many little gospels demanding of every emotion, of every instinct, "its certificate at the hand of some respectable authority." Without confidence in themselves or in things, and led by Science, which is as if one were led by one's note-book, they demand a reasonable explanation of every mystery. Not finding that explanation, they reject the mystery; which is as if the fly on the wheel rejected the wheel because it was hidden from his eyes by the dust of its own raising.

The mystic is at once the proudest and the humblest of men. He is as a child who resigns himself to the guidance of an unseen hand, the hand of one walking by his side; he resigns himself with the child's humility. And he has the pride of the humble, a pride manifesting itself in the calm rejection of every accepted map of the roads, of every offer of assistance, of every painted signpost pointing out the smoothest ways on which to travel. He demands no authority for the unseen hand whose fingers he feels upon his wrist. He conceives of life, not, indeed, so much as a road on which one walks, very much at one's own discretion, but as a blown and wandering ship, surrounded by a sea from which there is no glimpse of land; and he conceives that to the currents of that sea he may safely trust himself. Let his hand, indeed, be on the rudder, there will be no miracle worked for him; it is enough miracle that the sea should be there, and the ship, and he himself. He will never know why his hand should turn the rudder this way rather than that.

Jacob Boehme has said, very subtly, "that man does not perceive the truth, but God perceives the truth in man";

that is, that whatever we perceive or do is not perceived or done consciously by us, but unconsciously through us. Our business, then, is to tend that "inner light" by which most mystics have symbolised that which at once guides us in time and attaches us to eternity. This inner light is no miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit, but the perfectly natural, though it may finally be overcoming, ascent of the spirit within us. The spirit, in all men, being but a ray of the universal light, it can, by careful tending, by the removal of all obstruction, the cleansing of the vessel, the trimming of the wick, as it were, be increased, made to burn with a steadier, a brighter flame. In the last rapture it may become dazzling, may blind the watcher with excess of light, shutting him in within the circle of transfiguration, whose extreme radiance will leave all the rest of the world henceforth one darkness.

All mystics being concerned with what is divine in life, with the laws which apply equally to time and eternity, it may happen to one to concern himself chiefly with time seen under the aspect of eternity, to another to concern himself rather with eternity seen under the aspect of time. Thus many mystics have occupied themselves, very profitably, with showing how natural, how explicable on their own terms, are the mysteries of life; the whole aim of Maeterlinck is to show how mysterious all life is, "what an astonishing thing it is, merely to live." What he had pointed out to us, with certain solemn gestures, in his plays, he sets himself now to affirm, slowly, fully, with that "confidence in mystery" of which he speaks. Because "there is not an hour without its familiar miracles and its ineffable suggestions," he sets himself to show us these miracles and these meanings where others have not always sought or found

them, in women, in children, in the theatre. He seems to touch, at one moment or another, whether he is discussing *La Beauté Intérieure* or *Le Tragique Quotidien*, on all of these hours, and there is no hour so dark that his touch does not illuminate. And it is characteristic of him, of his "confidence in mystery," that he speaks always without raising his voice, without surprise or triumph, or the air of having said anything more than the simplest observation. He speaks, not as if he knew more than others, or had sought out more elaborate secrets, but as if he had listened more attentively.

Loving most those writers "whose works are nearest to silence," he begins his book, significantly, with an essay on Silence, an essay which, like all these essays, has the reserve, the expressive reticence, of those "active silences" of which he succeeds in revealing a few of the secrets.

"Souls," he tells us, "are weighed in silence, as gold and silver are weighed in pure water, and the words which we pronounce have no meaning except through the silence in which they are bathed. We seek to know that we may learn not to know"; knowledge, that which can be known by the pure reason, metaphysics, "indispensable" on this side of the "frontiers," being after all precisely what is least essential to us, since least essentially ourselves. "We possess a self more profound and more boundless than the self of the passions or of pure reason. . . . There comes a moment when the phenomena of our customary consciousness, what we may call the consciousness of the passions or of our normal relationships, no longer mean anything to us, no longer touch our real life. I admit that this consciousness is often interesting in its way, and that it is often necessary to know it thoroughly. But it is a surface plant,

and its roots fear the great central fire of our being. I may commit a crime without the least breath stirring the tiniest flame of this fire; and, on the other hand, the crossing of a single glance, a thought which never comes into being, a minute which passes without the utterance of a word, may rouse it into terrible agitations in the depths of its retreat, and cause it to overflow upon my life. Our soul does not judge as we judge; it is a capricious and hidden thing. It can be reached by a breath and unconscious of a tempest. Let us find out what reaches it; everything is there, for it is there that we ourselves are."

And it is towards this point that all the words of this book tend. Maeterlinck, unlike most men ("What is man but a God who is afraid?"), is not "miserly of immortal things." He utters the most divine secrets without fear, betraying certain hiding-places of the soul in those most nearly inaccessible retreats which lie nearest to us. All that he says we know already; we may deny it, but we know it. It is what we are not often at leisure enough with ourselves, sincere enough with ourselves, to realise; what we often dare not realise; but, when he says it, we know that it is true, and our knowledge of it is his warrant for saying it. He is what he is precisely because he tells us nothing which we do not already know, or, it may be, what we have known and forgotten.

The mystic, let it be remembered, has nothing in common with the moralist. He speaks only to those who are already prepared to listen to him, and he is indifferent to the "practical" effect which these or others may draw from his words. A young and profound mystic of our day has figured the influence of wise words upon the foolish and headstrong as "torches thrown into a burning city." The mystic

knows well that it is not always the soul of the drunkard or the blasphemer which is farthest from the eternal beauty. He is concerned only with that soul of the soul, that life of life, with which the day's doings have so little to do; itself a mystery, and at home only among those supreme mysteries which surround it like an atmosphere. It is not always that he cares that his message, or his vision, may be as clear to others as it is to himself. But, because he is an artist, and not only a philosopher, Maeterlinck has taken special pains that not a word of his may go astray, and there is not a word of this book which needs to be read twice, in order that it may be understood, by the least trained of attentive readers. It is, indeed, as he calls it, "The Treasure of the Lowly."

Le Trésor des Humbles is in some respects the most important, as it is certainly the most purely beautiful, of his works. Limiting himself as he did in his plays to the rendering of certain sensations, and to the rendering of these in the most disembodied way possible, he did not permit himself to indulge either in the weight of wisdom or the adornment of beauty, each of which would have seemed to him (perhaps wrongly) as an intrusion. Those web-like plays, a very spider's work of filminess, allowed you to divine behind them one who was after all a philosopher rather than a playwright. The philosopher could but be divined, he was never seen. In these essays he has dropped the disguise of his many masks. Speaking without intermediary, he speaks more directly, with a more absolute abandonment of every convention of human reserve, except the reserve of an extreme fastidiousness in the choice of words simple enough and sincere enough to convey exactly his meaning, more spontaneously, it would seem, than any

writer since Emerson. From Emerson he has certainly learnt much; he has found, for instance, the precise form in which to say what he has to say, in little essays, not, indeed, so disconnected as Emerson's, but with a like care to say something very definite in every sentence, so that that sentence might stand by itself, without its context, as something more than a mere part of a paragraph. But his philosophical system, though it has its essential links with the great mystical system, which has developed itself through many manifestations, from Plotinus and Porphyry downwards, is very much his own, and owes little to anything but his own meditation; and whether his subject is *La Beauté Intérieure* or *Les Femmes*, *Les Avertis*, or *Le Tragique Quotidien*, it is with the same wisdom, certainty, and beauty that he speaks. The book might well become the favourite reading of those persons to whom beauty must come with a certain dogmatism, if it is to be accepted for what it is. It reveals the inner life, with a simplicity which would seem the most obvious if it were not the rarest of qualities. It denies nothing, but it asserts many things, and it asserts nothing which has not been really seen.

In the preface to the first volume of his *Théâtre*, Maeterlinck takes us very simply into his confidence, and explains to us some of his intentions and some of his methods. He sees in *La Princesse Maleine* one quality, and one only: *une certaine harmonie épouvantée et sombre*. The other plays, up to *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, *présentent une humanité et des sentiments plus précis*, *en proie à des forces aussi inconnues*, *mais un peu mieux dessinées*. These unknown forces, *au fond desquelles on trouve l'idée du Dieu chrétien*, *mêlée à celle de la fatalité antique*, are realised, for the most part, under the form of death. A fragile, suffering, ignorant humanity is represented struggling through

a brief existence under the terror and apprehension of death. It is this conception of life which gives these plays their atmosphere, indeed their chief value. For, as we are rightly told, the primary element of poetry is :

l'idée que le poète se fait de l'inconnu dans lequel flottent les êtres et les choses qu'il évoque, du mystère qui les domine et les juge et qui préside à leurs destinées.

This idea it no longer seems to him possible to represent honestly by the idea of death, and he asks : What is there to take its place ?

Pour mon humble part, après les petits drames que j'ai énumérés plus haut, il m'a semblé loyal et sage d'écarter la mort de ce trône auquel il n'est pas certain qu'elle ait droit. Déjà, dans le dernier, que je n'ai pas nommé parmi les autres, dans " Aglavaine et Sélysette," j'aurais voulu qu'elle cédât à l'amour, à la sagesse ou au bonheur une part de sa puissance. Elle ne m'a pas obéi, et j'attends, avec la plupart des poètes de mon temps, qu'une autre force se révèle.

There is a fine and serious simplicity in these avowals, which show the intellectual honesty of Maeterlinck's dramatic work, its basis in philosophical thought. He is not merely a playwright who has found a method, he is a thinker who has to express his own conception of the universe, and therefore concerns literature. He finds that conception changing, and, for the moment, he stands aside, waiting. " The man who never alters his opinion," said Blake, " is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind."

Aglavaine et Sélysette is the most beautiful play that Maeterlinck has yet written; it is as beautiful as *Le Trésor des Humbles*. Hitherto, in his dramatic prose, he has deliberately refrained from that explicit beauty of phrase which is to be found in almost every sentence of the essays. Implicit

beauty there has been from the first, a beauty of reverie in which the close lips of his shadowy people seem afraid to do more than whisper a few vague words, mere hints of whatever dreams and thoughts had come to them out of the darkness. But of the elaborate beauty of the essays, in which an extreme simplicity becomes more ornate than any adornment, there has been, until now, almost nothing. In *Aglavaine et Sélysette* we have not merely beauty of conception and atmosphere, but writing which is beautiful in itself, and in which meditation achieves its own right to exist, not merely because it carries out that conception, or forms that atmosphere. And at the same time the very essence of the drama has been yet further spiritualised.

And, with this spiritualising of the very substance of what had always been so fully a drama of things unseen there comes, as we have said, a freer abandonment to the instinctive desire of the artist to write beautifully. Having realised that one need not be afraid of beauty, he is not afraid to let soul speak to soul in language worthy of both. And, curiously, at the same time he becomes more familiar, more human. Sélysette is quite the most natural character that Maeterlinck has ever drawn, as Aglavaine is the most noble. Méléandre is, perhaps, more shadowy than ever, but that is because he is deliberately subordinated in the composition, which is concerned only with the action upon one another of the two women. He suffers the action of these forces, does not himself act; standing between them as man stands between the calling of the intellectual and the emotional life, between the simplicity of daily existence, in which he is good, affectionate, happy, and the perhaps "immoral" heightening of that existence which is somewhat disastrously possible in the achievement of his dreams. In

this play, which touches so beautifully and so profoundly on so many questions, this eternal question is restated; of course, not answered. To answer it would be to find the missing word in the great enigma; and to Maeterlinck, who can believe in nothing which is not mystery, it is of the essence of his philosophy not to answer his own question.

A play written entirely on Elizabethan lines could no longer have even a semblance of anything but poetising. But a play written under Greek influence might turn out to be singularly modern, in the best sense of the word. Good classic and good modern qualities are often identical. Something of the close simplicity of Greek might perhaps be got finely into English dramatic verse. But, first of all, whatever influence is followed or resisted, there must be the great conception, the irresistible energy of life. There must be a great story, and it must be greatly conceived. Now the story of Paolo and Francesca, as Dante tells it, is one of the great stories of the world; but only as Dante tells it. Dante tells it in twenty lines, setting its luminous darkness against a background of actual hell-fire. Those twenty lines are one of the miracles of poetry, and they leave nothing more to be said. The story in itself, with its pensive, almost literary, fainting into passion, as the two lovers turn over the pages of a book, has not the eternal significance of the story of Tristan and Isolde, or the story of Venus and Tannhäuser. Paolo and Francesca are merely two of the innumerable company of young people who have fallen in love with one another, partly because there was a barrier to their love. Dante has given them immortality by poising them upon flaming winds in all the simplicity of a love which, we like to fancy, outlasts death: "the instant made

eternity." They are seen in passing; we remember them like a face seen once at a window.

Maeterlinck often makes his people say what they would only have thought, as, indeed, does every good dramatist; but when Maeterlinck's embodied spirits whisper their thoughts, into what an obscure depth of themselves have they not crouched down, out of the noisy wind that only drives the dust about the world! The people of a great dramatist seem to break away from his control, as if they forgot their maker, who can but strive to heighten the beauty of the words through which they express themselves. Having set them in motion, he is not responsible for the course they take; he is the automaton, not they. We hear their speech, and we say rightly that they could not have spoken otherwise. Is there any great drama of which this is not to be said?

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER, like most Frenchmen who write at all, wrote enormously. He is exceptional, not in the quantity of his work, but in the quality. To be poet, novelist, and critic is nothing to a Frenchman; but it is not everyone who can write poetry like the *Emaux et Camées*, tales like the *Nouvelles*, and criticisms like the *Portraits Contemporains*; to say nothing of such inspired Baedekers as the *Voyage en Espagne*. With Gautier the first need, the first capacity, was to write. The choice of subject was a quite secondary matter. He disliked the theatre, but, by a natural irony of fate, he spent a good deal of his life in writing dramatic criticisms, which, of course, he wrote admirably. Caring for quiet more than for most things, he was often obliged to write at the office of his paper, with an accompaniment obbligato of printing-presses. *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was written in six weeks, in the midst of every sort of distraction. For what lazy people call "inspiration" he had the contempt of a workmanlike man of letters. The Goncourts, in that brilliant early novel *Charles Demailly*, have put into the mouth of Masson, who stands for Gautier, a sort of confession of faith to which Gautier, in a whimsical moment, might well have given utterance. "I draw up my chair," says Masson to a *poseur* who has been setting forth his "system" of work; "I put on the table the paper, the pens, the ink, all the instru-

ments of torture; and how it bores me! It has always bored me to write, and then it is so useless! Well, I write like that, deliberately, like a notary public. I do not go fast, but I am always going; for, you see, I don't search for the best. An article, a page, is like a child: either it is or it is not. I never think about what I am going to write. I take my pen and write. I am a man of letters: I ought to know my trade. Here is the paper before me; I am like the clown on his spring-board. And then I have a syntax very well in order in my head; I throw my phrases into the air—like cats! I am sure they will fall on their feet. It is quite simple: you only need to have a good syntax." So Gautier might really have said, knowing well just how much of sober truth went to the making of his paradoxes, which are not so paradoxical as they seem. What sounds like the confession of a contented hack is really the declaration of a perfectly accomplished master. For always, with Gautier, the work so hurriedly done, in seeming, was done with the same exquisite sense of form, the same exquisite finish of style. Apparently it was impossible for him to write badly. His style, like his handwriting, was so perfectly under his control, that it was equally out of the question for him to compose a badly formed sentence or to pen a badly formed letter. Never was a compliment more deserved than the title of *parfait magicien ès Lettres Françaises*, under which Baudelaire dedicated the *Fleurs du Mal* to his *très-cher et très-vénéré maître et ami*, Théophile Gautier.

Extreme attention to form is generally, and wrongly, supposed to indicate a certain disregard of substance, and the formula of "art for art's sake" has been taken to mean something very different from its real meaning. Gautier and Flaubert in France, Rossetti and Pater in England, are

writers who have often been blamed by the critics for a carelessness about organic idea of which they are rarely enough guilty. It is not because a man's ideas are hazy that he takes care to give them rich and beautiful expression; but rather because his ideas are themselves precise and beautiful, and require to be expressed so that they may lose as little as possible in their translation into words. Gautier's mastery of form, as it happened, was natural and instinctive; unlike Flaubert, who agonised over the faultless composition of a sentence, he had only to take up his pen and write down the first words that presented themselves to his mind, certain that they would be the best words. Concise in his poetry, he is somewhat liberal of speech in his prose; where, also, he relies more on sonority; indulging, too, in what is conventionally called eloquence. But how faithful the style is everywhere to what it serves to express! an abounding wealth of contents, not exactly thought, it is true, but sensations and impressions, realised with an unparalleled freshness, directness, intensity. Gautier's outlook on life, and his view of his own work there, are expressed in that famous sentence, "I am a man for whom the visible world exists." Maxime du Camp, his biographer, contends that he literally invented descriptive prose; his descriptive verse is not less new in the explicit exactitude with which it reproduces things seen. Gautier, in prose and verse alike, is the poet of physical beauty, of the beauty of the exterior of things. *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, that "golden book of spirit and sense," is one long ecstatic hymn to Beauty, the pagan, not the Christian, ideal: an ideal in which the soul counts for little or nothing, a grace of expression at most, and the lines and contours, the delights of form and colour, count for much. It is the same ideal, chastened, indeed, and less hotly followed,

that we find in the carved and inlaid work of the *Emaux et Camées*. Gautier's poetry always resembles plastic art; and it is more often the art of the worker in marble or in onyx than the work of the painter. His prose is definitely pictorial: the outlines, always firm and precise if you search them out, are flooded with colour, bathed in atmosphere. Alike in poetry and in prose, what he gives us is, if we like to call it so, superficial: a man for whom the visible world existed, he was content with that world as his eyes saw it. But no, he was not content: this Greek in spirit, who remembered a former existence in which he walked with Pericles, had the same haunting sense of something strange and unknown, some distressing mystery in things, as the Greeks, the worshippers of beauty, who have left us a literature in which life is overshadowed by an inexorable Fatality. That singular and impressive poem, *La Comédie de la Mort*, derives all its power from the shivering horror of its contemplation of death: exaggerated, *macabre*, one may call it; yet how natural a development of precisely that theory (habit, rather) of living by sensations! Just because he relishes the charm of life so keenly, because he cares so passionately for the human form, for the beauty of the visible world, Gautier dreads, more than most, the soiling and displacing touch of Death. So he has given expression, without intending it, to a whole philosophy and seems to become the moralist of his own failure to be perfectly happy on the terms of the senses.

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

C'EST *certainement que cet homme a pour âme la Poésie elle-même*, said an eloquent critic, not always so enthusiastic; and the word, in its pardonable exaggeration, is admirably descriptive. Banville, whether he wrote in verse or in prose, was a poet and nothing but a poet. Never was a man more absolutely devoted to, more entirely absorbed in, his art. He lived all his life in a state of poetic exaltation, not so much indifferent to external events as unconscious of them: I mean what are called important events, for he was Parisian of the Parisians, and delighted in the little incidents of the hour, which could be put into verse. But, though he loved nature and man, he loved art more than either; more than anything in the world, which was nevertheless so bright and satisfying to him. More than any poet of the day, he realised the joy of life, and with him, far more truly than with Gautier, of whom he says it,

l'œuvre fut un hymne en fête
A la vie ivre de soleil.

Among a great company of pessimistic poets, from Leconte de Lisle, with his calm and terrible Nihilism, his troubled aspiration after the Nirvana of annihilation, to the petulant and theatrical *Blasphèmes* of Richepin, Théodore de Banville remained true to the old faith (or should we call it the old heresy?) that the poet should be a messenger of joy, a singer

of beauty. He had no theory of life to propound, except that spring is joyous, spring is fleeting, therefore gather the rosebuds while ye may :

Aimer le vin,
La beauté, le printemps divin,
Cela suffit. Le reſte eſt vain.

His philosophy is a frank, inſtinctive Epicureanism, a delighted acceptance of all that is delightful in the moments as they pass ; with the leaſt possible remembrance, if to remember is to regret, when they have gone for ever. It never occurred to him to queſtion whether life was worth living, and he seems never to have supposed that this was not the beſt of all possible worlds. With so ingenuous a faith in things as they are, he laid himself open to the charge of being superficial ; and, indeed, if it is the poet's duty to deal with what are called great queſtions, the queſtions that diſturb the mind of the schoolmaſter and the curate, then Banville failed in his duty. But if Ronsard, if Herrick, had any conception of the proper province of poetry, then Banville too, in his different, but not radically different way, was a poet.

Théodore de Banville was born at Moulins, March 14, 1823. His father was a retired naval lieutenant, and it is to him that he dedicated his second book. His firſt book, *Les Cariatides*, published when he was nineteen, was dedicated to his mother, for whom, year by year, he made a little collection of birthday verses, finally published in 1878, under the name of *Roses de Noël*. Banville's life was uneventful : it has a date to mark his birth, a date (sixty-eight years later, almoſt to a day) to mark his death. He never married, he was not elected to the Academy, he had no

special and startling triumphs in a literary career which was long, honoured, and successful. "A poet whose life has been modest and unobserved," he said, "has no biography but his works." *Les Cariatides*, his first volume, was a remarkable achievement for a poet of nineteen. The influence of Hugo, whom Banville never ceased to worship as the poet of poets, was naturally evident. The whole book is quite in the early romantic manner, with stanzas full of proper names, poems addressed to the Venus of Milo, poems about sultanas. But there is also, already, the soaring lyric flight, and even a certain power of sustaining the flight. The boy has a vocabulary, and if he has not yet a style, he knows very well, at all events, how to say what he wants to say. And there are *dixains* in the manner of Clément Marot, rondeaux, rondeaux redoublés, triolets; experiments in those old forms that Banville has done so much to bring into use again. *Les Stalactites*, as the author tells us, from the standpoint of twenty-three, are decidedly more mature than *Les Cariatides*. That fundamental characteristic of Banville, lyric joy, had indeed been evident from the first, but here it breaks forth more spontaneously, more effectually. "An immense appetite for happiness and hope lies at the root of our souls. To reconquer the lost joy, to remount with intrepid foot the azure stairway leading to the skies": such, Banville tells us in his preface, is the incessant aspiration of modern man; his own aspiration, he should have said. In 1852 appeared a characteristic little play, *Le Feuilleton d'Aristophane*, the best, perhaps, as it is the most famous, of Banville's lyric dramas. It is a sort of *revue de l'année*, done with immense spirit and gaiety, and with a wealth of real poetry instead of the usual meagre measure of doggerel. It is full of wit and of a fantastic, essentially modern kind of

poetry, which is yet entirely individual. The play was followed by some charming books of prose (*Les Pauvres Saltimbanques*, *La Vie d'une Comédienne*), and then came a little volume of *Odelettes* (1856), a book of spring verses, dedicated by Banville to his friends. Next year appeared anonymously, in a quaintly got-up green pamphlet, the *Odes Funambulesques*.

"The *Odes Funambulesques* have not been signed," said the preface, "because they were not worth the trouble." "Here are fantasies assuredly more than frivolous; they will do nothing to change the constitution of society, and they have not even, like some poems of our time, the excuse of genius. Worse, the ideal boundary which marks the limit of good taste is overstepped at every moment, and, as M. Ponsard judiciously remarks, in a line which should survive his works, if the works themselves do not remain immortal:

When that is overstepped, there is no limit left!"

So the author introduces his rope-dancing verses. Their allusiveness renders some of them difficult for the readers of to-day, yet they have the qualities that remain. To be familiar, to be jocular, to burlesque the respectabilities, to overflow into parody, to exhibit every kind of rhythmical agility; to dance on the tight-rope of verse, and yet to be always poetical, always the lyric poet, is a feat which few have ever accomplished, a feat which Banville has never accomplished so deftly as in these wittily named *Odes Funambulesques*. There is a series of *Occidentales*, parodies of Hugo's *Orientales*; there are satires in the stately manner, and satires which explode into sparks like fireworks; there are rondeaux, triolets, pantoums. Juvenal-Pierrot, Boileau-Harlequin, as

Barbey d'Aurevilly called him, Banville has spread a feast of light-hearted gaiety which has even now a certain savour. Here is an untranslatable triolet, the whole fun of which depends on the rhymes ; preposterously clever rhymes which sing themselves over one's head through a whole evening :

Mademoiselle Michonnet
Est une actrice folichonne.
Autrefois chacun bichonnait
Mademoiselle Michonnet.
Le public qui la bouchonnait
Dans ses dents aujourd'hui machonne :
Mademoiselle Michonnet
Est une actrice folichonne.

In the same year with the *Odes Funambulesques*, a collection of some of Banville's most serious and " heightened " work was printed under the name of *Le Sang de la Coupe*, and in 1866 (after more plays and more books of prose) appeared his finest volume of serious poems, *Les Exilés*, and his finest play, *Gringoire*, well known to English playgoers under the name of *The Ballad-Monger*.

In the preface of *Les Exilés* Banville writes : " This book is perhaps the one into which I have put the most of myself and my soul, and if one book of mine is to last I would desire that it should be this one." This book, into which he tells us he has put the most of himself, is entirely impersonal, and it is characteristic of Banville that this should be so. What was deepest in him was a passion for art, for poetry, which to him was literally, and not figuratively, something inspired. " Like the art of antiquity, his art," said Gautier, " expresses only what is beautiful, joyous, noble, grand, rhythmical." The poems in *Les Exilés* are mainly

on classical subjects; they have always a measure of classic charm, a large, clear outline, a purity of line, a suave colour. There is fire in them as well as grace; some of them are painted with hot flesh-tints, as *Une Femme de Rubens*. But the classical note predominates, and in such verse as this, written for *La Source* of Ingres, there is none of the romantic trouble, but a clear silver flow, the sweep of broad and placid rhythms:

Oh! ne la troublez pas! La solitude seule
Et le silence ami par son souffle adouci
Ont le droit de savoir pourquoi sourit ainsi
Blanche, oh! si blanche, avec ses rougeurs d'églantine,
Debout contre le roc, la Naïade argentine!

In the *Idylles Prussiennes* published in 1872, Banville returned to the composition of "occasional poems," this time ironical and indignant, and touched with the tragedy of daily events: they were printed Monday by Monday in *Le National* during the siege of Paris. Then, in 1874, he published a charming series of sonnets, *Les Princesses*, on "those great Princesses whose mysterious eyes, whose red lips, have been, through all the ages, the desire and delight of all humankind." More books of prose followed, *Contes*, *Souvenirs*, *Esquisses Parisiennes*, with a *Petit Traité de Poésie Française*, the most poetically written of all textbooks to poetry, the most dogmatic, by no means the least practical, and altogether the most inspiring. The volume called *Mes Souvenirs*, sketches and anecdotes of most of the Romantics, known and unknown, is the most charming book of literary *souvenirs* in the world. In 1884 came another volume of effervescent verse, *Nous Tous*; and in 1890 a new collection, *Sonnailles et Clochettes*, poems published in

newspapers, really journalistic verse, which is really poetry. It is a new art, which it amused Banville to invent and practise; for how amusing it is, he said, "to offer people pebbles of Eldorado, pearls and diamonds, saying gaily: Only a penny a-piece!"

Banville's poetry astonishes one, first of all, by its virtuosity. He is the greatest master of rhyme who has ever used the French language, a perfect Ingoldsby; one of the greatest masters of rhythm and poetical technique, a very Swinburne. But he is not merely great by reason of his form. It is true that he has no passion and little that can be called intellectual substance. His verse is nothing but verse, but it is that; it is sheer poetry, with no other excuse for its existence than this very sufficing reason, its own beauty. Banville sometimes deals with splendid subjects, as in the *Malédiction de Cypris*, but he never sought very carefully for subjects; confident of his singing-voice, he sang. And he sang of the eternal commonplaces, eternally poetical; of the nightingale, the night and the stars, of April and the flowers, of wine and of song, of love: as light and charming as their classic names. He could write:

Ruisseaux! forêts! silence!
O mes amours d'enfance!

and yet turn these trite old "properties" into poetry. What he wrote was mostly "occasional verse," but with him "occasional verse" was transformed into abiding poetry. That has been done before, by Herrick for example, but whenever it is done it is an achievement, and Banville, alone among modern poets, has won this difficult success.

HENRY MURGER

PARIS has its bust of Murger now, the Latin Quarter had its brave day's enthusiasm, and the academic criticism, and the criticism of the pitiless *jeunes*, have wearied a little of repeating the old arguments against Bohemia, against the *Scènes de la Vie de Bohême*. Murger has his faults as a writer: it cannot be said that his prose is distinguished, his taste impeccable, his tears or his laughter quite invariably convincing. But he has written a book that lives, and there is no arguing against such a fact. It has been gravely enquired whether these *Scènes de la Vie de Bohême* are true to life; whether Musette, Rodolphe, and Mimi are probable characters; whether the sentiment of the whole thing is not false sentiment. People ask strange questions. As long as men and women are young, and not quite virtuous, so long will this kind of life exist, just thus; and never has it been rendered so simply, sympathetically, and with so youthful a touch of sentiment, as in Murger's pages. And this sentiment, is it false sentiment? It is the sentiment youth has of itself at the flowering moment of existence; and to whom, and in what sense, does a disillusioning experience give the right to deny the "truth" of a sentiment which had at least the irresistible force of a sensation? To be five-and-twenty, poor, and in love: that is enough; at that age and under those circumstances, you will feel that Murger has said everything. They tell us that the

Latin Quarter has changed, that the *grisette* no longer exists, that people are quite cynical and serious nowadays, and that

la belle
Qui m'aima quand elle eut le temps

has no time now. Ah! there is always time for these little distractions, when one cares to indulge in them; and youth, after all, is not so variable a quantity as our historians would have us imagine. Fashions change, the curls and the crinolines; but not "the way of a man with a maid." And that is what Murger has fixed for us in these impromptu-like pages, not in the fine impersonal way of the outside observer, but gaily, pathetically, as such moods make up the joy and pity of our ways of loving.

Full of fun as the book is, of keen wit and exuberant humour, it is one of the saddest of books, sad with the consciousness that

La jeunesse n'a qu'un temps.

All these merry, shifting, shiftless people seem continually to be saying "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"; they have the feverish gaiety of the gambler who has staked all on one throw. It is all for love; and love, with them, is known as much by its bitter inconstancy as by its momentary sweetness. *Muse de l'infidélité*, Murger addresses the eternal Musette, in that song which is part of her immortality:

Non, ma jeunesse n'est pas morte,
Il n'est pas mort ton souvenir;
Et si tu frappais à ma porte,
Mon cœur, Musette, irait t'ouvrir.

Puisqu'à ton nom toujours il tremble,
Muse de l'infidélité,
Reviens encor manger ensemble
Le pain béni de la gaîté.

Love, with him, as Gautier pointed out, "presents itself only as a memory." It is at least always apprehended, even at the sharpest moment of enjoyment, as but the flash of the foam on the crest of a wave breaking.

And then, along with this pathetic feeling in regard to love, there is another, more sordid, not less actual, kind of pathos: the cold of winter nights in a garret, the odour of rich men's dinners as one passes penniless in the street. These people are very genuinely poor, and they discover no hidden treasures. They want, too, to be famous, and they have neither the talent nor the luck for even that, the poor man's consolation. They see the hospital at the end of the way; at most they divine it around the corner, and meanwhile there is the reality of day by day, the necessity of a few poor luxuries: Mimi's bonnet, Francine's muff. Here, once more, is a sentiment which only the quite rich and fortunate can distinguish as "false."

Yes, Murger is a veracious historian; believe him, if you do not know, or have forgotten, that such are the annals of Bohemia. There, people love just so lightly and sincerely, weep and laugh just so freely, are really hungry, really have their ambitions, and at times die of all these maladies. It is the gayest and most melancholy country in the world. Not to have visited it, is to have made the grand tour for nothing. To have lived there too long, is to find all the rest of the world an exile. But if you have been there or not, read Murger's pages; there, perhaps, after all, you will see more of the country than anything less than a lifetime spent in it will show you.

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

THE *Journal Intime* of Benjamin Constant, only lately published in its entirety, is one of the most curious and instructive human documents that have been provided for the surprise and enlightenment of the student of souls. *Une des singularités de ma vie*, wrote the author of *Adolphe*, in a letter to a friend, *c'est d'avoir toujours passé pour l'homme le plus insensible et le plus sec et d'avoir été constamment gouverné et tourmenté par des sentiments indépendants de tout calcul et même destructifs de tous mes intérêts de position, de gloire et de fortune*. And, indeed, there was not a single interest, out of the many that occupied his life, which he did not destroy by some inconsequence of action, for no reason in the world, apparently, except some irrational necessity of doing exactly the opposite of what he ought to have done, of what he wanted to do. *Si je savais ce que je veux, je saurais mieux ce que je fais*, he wrote once; and through all his disturbed and inexplicable existence, he was never able to make up his mind, at least for a sufficient period, as to what he really wanted. Love, political power, and literary fame were the three main interests of his life: and it was the caprice of his nature, in regard to all three, to build with one hand while he pulled down his own work with the other. How well he knew his own weakness this *Journal* shows us on every page. *Heureux*, he writes, *qui se replie sur lui-même, qui ne demande point de bonheur, qui vit avec sa pensée et attend la*

mort sans s'épuiser en vaines tentatives pour adoucir ou embellir sa vie ! He seems always, somewhat unreasonably, to have held out such an ideal before himself, and it was one of his dissatisfactions never to have attained it. He tells us somewhere : *La meilleure qualité que le ciel m'ait donnée, c'est celle de m'amuser de moi-même.* But this was precisely what he could never do, in any satisfying measure ; at best it was a very bitter kind of amusement. He fled himself, to find refuge, if he might, among others ; like his own *Adolphe*, who tells us, in a memorable sentence, *je me reposais, pour ainsi dire, dans l'indifférence des autres, de la fatigue de son amour.* But the indifference of others drove him back upon himself ; and so, all through life, he found himself tossed to and fro, always irresolute, always feverishly resolved to take some decided step, and, at times, taking it, always at the disastrous moment. *Il faut se décider, agir et se taire*, he writes in his *Journal*, fully conscious that he will never do any of the three. And he laments : *Si dans six mois je ne suis pas hors de tous ces embarras qui, en réalité, n'existent que dans ma tête, je ne suis qu'un imbécile et je ne me donnerai plus la peine de m'écouter.*

He was never tired of listening to himself, and the acute interest of this *Journal* consists in the absolute sincerity of its confessions, and at the same time the scrutinising self-consciousness of every word that is written down. *Il y a en moi deux personnes*, as he truly says, *dont l'une observe l'autre* ; and he adds : *Ainsi, dans ce moment, je suis triste, mais si je voulais, je serais, non pas consolé, mais tellement distrait de ma peine qu'elle serait comme nulle.* Thus when one who was perhaps his best friend, Mlle. Talma, was dying, he spends day and night by her bedside, overwhelmed with grief ; and he writes in his *Journal* : *J'y étudie la mort.* His own

conclusion from what he has observed in himself is: *Je ne suis pas tout à fait un être réel.* On the contrary, he is very real, with that distressing kind of reality which afflicts the artist, and out of which, after he has duly suffered for it, he creates his art, as Benjamin Constant created *Adolphe*. *Adolphe*, a masterpiece of psychological narrative, from which the modern novel of analysis may be said to have arisen, is simply a human document, in which Benjamin Constant has told the story of his *liaison* with Madame de Staël. Look at the *Journal*, and you will see how abundantly the man suffered. *Tous les volcans sont moins flamboyants qu'elle; rupture décisive*: this on one page, and on the next, *Madame de Staël m'a reconquis.* A few pages further on: *Je sens que je passerais pour un monstre si je la quitte; je mourrai si je ne la quitte pas. Je la regrette et je la hais.* And the next line tells us that he has returned to her side, *malheureux que je suis*! He suffers because he can neither be entirely absorbed, nor, for one moment, indifferent; that very spirit of analysis, which would seem to throw some doubt on the sincerity of his passion, does but intensify the acuteness with which he feels it. It is like the turning of the sword in a wound. Coldness it certainly is not, though it produces the effect of coldness; selfishness it may be, but is anything more sincere, or more certain to produce its own misery, than just that quality of selfishness common to all exacting lovers? No, Benjamin Constant, as this *Journal* shows him to us, was a very real being; singularly human in his inconsequences, the fever and exhaustion of his desires, the impossible gifts he asked of Fate, the impossible demands he made upon himself and others. He sums up and typifies the artistic temperament at its acutest point of weakness; the temperament which can neither resist, nor dominate,

nor even wholly succumb to, emotion; which is for ever seeking its own hurt, with the persistence almost of mania; which, if it ruins other lives in the pursuit, as is supposed, of artistic purposes, gains at all events no personal satisfaction out of the bargain; except, indeed, when one has written *Adolphe*, the satisfaction of having lived unhappily for more than sixty years, and left behind one a hundred pages that are still read with admiration, sixty years afterwards.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

AS a writer, Maupassant was *de race*, as the French say; he was the lineal descendant of the early *conteurs*. Trained under the severe eye of the impeccable Flaubert, he owed infinitely, no doubt, to that training, and much to the actual influence of the great novelist, who, in *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, has given us the type of the modern novel. But his style is quite different from that of Flaubert, of which it has none of the splendid, subdued richness, the harmonious movement; it is clear, precise, sharply cut, without ornament or elaboration; with much art, certainly, in its deliberate plainness, and with the admirable skill of an art which conceals art. M. Halévy has aptly applied to him the saying of Vauvenargues: *La netteté est le vernis des maîtres*. Not Swift himself had a surer eye or hand for the exact, brief, malicious notation of things and ideas. He seems to use the first words that come to hand, in the order in which they naturally fall; and when he has reached this point he stops, not conceiving that there is anything more to be done. So, if he has not invented a new style, like Goncourt, he has carried on the tradition of French prose, faultlessly.

As a novelist, Maupassant has done remarkable and admirable work; but it is as a *conteur* that he is supreme, and it is in his *contes* that he will live. As a writer of the *nouvelle*, or short story, Maupassant has no rival. He saw

exactly so much of nature in general, and exactly so much of a given incident or emotion, as could be realised within the limits of a short story, in which there would be just room for a clear, firm statement of the facts. His ability in selecting and fitting his material, threatened to become mechanical, a skill of the hand merely; but it never did so. Compare one of his tales with a tale of even so brilliant a story-writer as Kipling, and his supremacy in this difficult art manifests itself at once. A tale by Kipling is merely an anecdote; an anecdote of the most vivid kind, but nothing more. What is lacking? Just that which seems to count for so little, and which really counts for so much: the moral idea. With Maupassant, the moral idea is always there, at the root of what may seem at first a mere anecdote; it is there, permeating the whole substance of the story, giving it its vitality, and its place in the organism of nature. Every story is thus rounded, and becomes complete in itself by becoming the part of a great whole. Even Maupassant's cynicism, which was fundamental, and which sent him for his subjects to the seamy side, always, of things, could not vitiate in him this principle of all great art. His apprehension of what I call the moral idea was certainly not what in England is called moral; and it must be admitted that much of his work is unnecessarily, wantonly unpleasant, and that most of it is not quite needfully sordid. But, being professedly not a psychologist, being content to leave the soul out of the question, he found that the animal passions were at the root of our nature, that they gave rise to the most vivid and interesting kind of action, and he persisted in rendering mainly the animal side of life. Probably no writer has ever done so more convincingly, with a more thorough knowledge of his subject, and a more perfect mastery of his

knowledge. In his later work he seemed to be trying his hand at psychology, to be beginning to concern himself about the soul. It was a deviation from his true path, the path of his success ; and the avenging madness came to save him, as he is now finally saved by death, from the fatality of a possible " ascent " out of his solid and sufficing materialism.

LECONTE DE LISLE

THE death of Leconte de Lisle deprived France of one of the most remarkable poets of the present age. The successor in the Academy to the chair of Victor Hugo, he had been to a certain degree the successor of Victor Hugo in a sort of leadership in poetry. Perhaps the first definite signs of the wane of Hugo's influence might be traced in the Parnassian movement, of which Leconte de Lisle was the acknowledged head. That movement having had its day, and a new school taken its place, Leconte de Lisle has long since lost all influence as an active force. It is the fashion, indeed, in Paris just now, among the younger men, to deny that he was a poet at all. Such monstrous injustice is equally unjust to the catholic-minded poet in whose honour this last dethronement has been made; for has not Paul Verlaine written, *Leconte de Lisle est un grand et noble poète*?

Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle was born in the island of Réunion, October 23, 1818. His first volume, the *Poèmes Antiques*, was published in 1853; *Poèmes et Poésies* followed in 1855; then came *Poèmes Barbares; Poèmes Tragiques; Les Erinnyes* and *L'Apollonide*, two classical dramas, both of which have been acted at the Odéon; and he has translated into prose, with extraordinarily sympathetic literalness, Homer, Hesiod, Theocritus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, and Horace. Never was a poet more

actually and more fundamentally a scholar; and his poetry both gains and loses, but certainly becomes what it is, through this scholarship, which was not merely concerned with Greece and Rome, but with the East as well; a scholarship not only of texts, but of the very spirit of antiquity. That tragic calmness which was his favourite attitude towards life and fate; that haughty dissatisfaction with the ugliness and triviality of the present, the pettiness and unreason of humanity; that exclusive worship of immortal beauty; that single longing after the annihilating repose of Nirvana; was it not the all-embracing pessimism (if we like to call it, for convenience, by such a name) which is the wisdom of the East, modified, certainly, by a temperament which had none of the true Eastern serenity? In spite of his theory of impassibility, Leconte de Lisle has expressed only himself, whether through the mouth of Cain or of Hypatia; and in the man, as I just knew him, I seemed to see all the qualities of his work; in the rigid, impressive head, the tenacity of the cold eyes, the ideality of the forehead, the singularly unsensuous lips, a certain primness, even, in the severity, the sarcasm, of the mouth. Passion in Leconte de Lisle is only an intellectual passion; emotion is never less than epical; the self which he expresses through so many immobile masks is almost never a realisable human being, who has lived and loved. Thus it is, not merely that all this splendid writing, so fine as literature in the abstract, can never touch the multitude, but that for the critic of literature also there is a sense of something lacking. His verse is clear, sonorous, dignified, deliberate in movement, classically correct in rhythm, full of exotic local colour, of savage names, of realistic rhetoric. It has its own kind of romance, in its "legend of the ages," so different from

Hugo's, so much fuller of scholarship and the historic sense, yet with so far less of human pity. Coldness cultivated as a kind of artistic distinction seems to turn all his poetry to marble, in spite of the fire at its heart. Most of Leconte de Lisle's poems are little chill epics, in which legend is fossilised. They have the lofty monotony of a single conception of life and of the universe. He sees the world as what Byron called it, "a glorious blunder," and desires only to stand a little apart from the throng, meditating scornfully. Hope, with him, becomes no more than this desperate certainty:

Tu te tairas, ô voix sinistre des vivants !

His only prayer is to Death, "divine Death," that it may gather its children to its breast:

Affranchis-nous du temps, du nombre et de l'espace,
Et rends-nous le repos que la vie a troublé !

The interval, which is his, he accepts with something of the defiance of his own Cain, refusing to fill it with the triviality of happiness, waiting even upon beauty with a certain inflexible austerity. He listens and watches, throughout the world, for echoes and glimpses of great tragic passions, languid with fire in the East, a tumultuous conflagration in the Middle Ages, a sombre darkness in the heroic ages of the North. The burning emptiness of the desert attracts him, the inexplicable melancholy of the dogs that bark at the moon; he would interpret the jaguar's dreams, the sleep of the condor. He sees nature with the same wrathful impatience as man, praising it for its destructive energies, its haste to crush out human life before the stars fall into chaos, and the world with them, as one of the least of stars. He sings the *Dies Iræ* exultingly; only

seeming to desire an end of God as well as of man—universal nothingness. He conceives that he does well to be angry, and this anger is indeed the personal note of his pessimism; but it leaves him somewhat apart from the philosophical poets, too fierce for wisdom and not rapturous enough for poetry. Never was fine work in verse so absolutely the negation of Milton's three requirements, that poetry should be simple, sensuous, and passionate. And, perhaps, in spite of the remarkable originality of *Les Eléphants*, *Les Hurleurs*, and all that group of exotic flora and fauna; in spite of the tragic irony of *Un Acte de Charité* and its companion pieces; in spite of all the scholarly and all the curious work which he did in so many kinds, the most really poetic part of his poetry, that by which he will live, is to be found in such poems as *Requies* and *Le Dernier Souvenir*, in which he has said, with perfect simplicity and with perfect calmness, all there is to be said of the actual emptiness of life, and the possible horror of death.

CATULLE MENDÈS

CATULLE MENDÈS has the curious, and scarcely enviable, distinction of having done nearly everything, in literature, nearly as well as everybody. His earlier verse, in the manner of Hugo, is hardly to be distinguished from genuine Hugo; his Parnassian verse is so pre-eminently Parnassian that it may almost be taken as the type of that manner; when he tired of doing impeccable Leconte de Lisle, he did faultless Banville and almost deceptive Verlaine. And, indeed, he may be said to have invented some of his masters, whom (François Coppée for instance) he certainly started on the road of letters. In prose he has written novels which partake of the *roman à clef*, the *succès de scandale*, and the *document humain*, novels which are at all events written in beautiful French, a little subtle and perverse, but full of surprising and delicious graces. And he has done the most elegantly improper short stories that can be conceived, fairy tales of such ethereal innocence that they might be read by little winged angels; he has invented adorable ballets, written librettos more musical than the music to which they were set; and he has given to all the worthier of his contemporaries the most just and ungrudging praise of any contemporary critic. Then he is one of the best talkers in Paris; at fifty he looks like his own younger brother; in life and in literature, he is one of the successes of the day. And, in its way, his success is deserved; for,

in his way, he is a true man of letters. His misfortune is to be a man of letters who has nothing to say, or, in other words, who can say everything. With equal indifference, with equal ease, he addresses

Cypris, fille de l'onde, adorable chimère,
Immortelle aux yeux noirs, Reine au cœur indulgent,
Qui mires la beauté dans les hymnes de Homère !

and, in laughing stanzas, Peppa Invernizzi of the Opera :

Mousse aux galères de Watteau,
Fine lèvre, œil mi-clos qui cligne,
Tu fus le Gille, aile maligne,
Posé sur un pizzicato ;

and both are alike to him " but as the sound of lyres and flutes." What is amazing is that even in his most frivolous verse (in the latest volume for instance, *La Grive des Vignes*) he never, even when he must be in reality most sincere, gets a convincing sincerity in expression. Verse which is really the exact utterance of no matter how fleeting, how trivial, how unworthy, a moment of real sincerity, assures its own immortality. When Rochester writes :

Give me leave to rail at you,
I ask nothing but my due ;
To call you false, and then to say
You shall not keep my heart a day ;
But, alas ! against my will,
I must be your captive still.
Ah ! be kinder then ; for I
Cannot change, and would not die ;

he expresses, with only the natural sophistication of the lover, a truly human sentiment. But the fatal fact is that Catulle Mendès expresses, not the human, but the Parisian sentiment; and so we get, even when there is really some personal feeling at the back of it, *l'article de Paris*, and no more. No problem in literature is more curious than the question of what constitutes poetic sincerity, and how that quality is attained. It is apparently independent of poetic craftsmanship, or certainly Mendès could have compassed it, and yet it can rarely be achieved without a consummate and conscious art, or how many minor poets (who really mean well) would have achieved it! With Mendès, however, there is a defect in the intention: he does not write because something calls for expression, but because he would like to express something prettily. His devotion to form is unbounded, but he does not realise that form depends on ideas, and that the most ingenious words in the world cannot make ideas. In his prose, these defects of his qualities are somewhat less conspicuous, somewhat less irretrievable, because his prose is mostly fiction, and fiction must at least have so much of fact in it as to deal with human life and the actualities of society. So it is that the best work he has ever done is to be found in a novel called *La Femme Enfant* in which his gracious, flimsy, and perverse talent has for once found a subject as gracious, flimsy, and perverse as itself. Liliane, the depraved little ballet-girl, whose virginal innocence of face is but the flower of a soul in which vice has sprung, unconscious of itself, is a type which has never been so perfectly expressed before, a type whose very artificiality is, for once, truly human. Here, to my mind, Mendès has achieved his one really serious success, and it is because he has had something to say, because the idea

has made the book. Yet he remains, for the warning of all clever people, the cleverest of them all, clever to the point of self-annihilation; and his work, charming, elegant, accomplished, with all the semblance of what it is not, the work too of a man of letters, but of a man of letters who writes to please, pleases, certainly, for its moment; and then, the moment after, has melted away, like the snows of yesterday, or yesterday's ice at Jullien's.

ANATOLE FRANCE

ANATOLE FRANCE is a man of letters, *amateur* in the fine sense, who would willingly have you believe him something of the amateur in the looser and more current meaning of the word. He has attempted a good many things, somewhat different in kind from one another, in which he has shown an extreme care and scrupulousness in the matter of writing, a sincere endeavour after no limited or facile sort of perfection, and, especially a fixed determination that literature, with him, shall be literature. He has written criticism, fiction, and verse. It is probable that he is a slow worker, and that his work costs him a considerable labour. But it amuses him to seem aloof from his work, a little careless, a little disdainful of it, even, and to admit: *J'en parle avec un absolu désintéressement, étant, par nature, fort détaché des choses, et disposé à me demander chaque soir, avec l'Ecclésiaste: "Quel fruit revient à l'homme de tout l'ouvrage?"* He looks back with regret to the time when he was a student, not a writer. *J'ai vécu d'heureuses années sans écrire. Je menais une vie contemplative et solitaire dont le souvenir m'est encore infiniment doux.* In the preface to the first volume of *La Vie Littéraire*, he explains how the editor of *Le Temps* drew him out of his seclusion, and forced him to become a critic, a service for which everyone must be profoundly grateful to M. Hébrard. For it is as a critic that he has, perhaps, the largest claim on our attention, a

critic of so personal a kind that he is at the same time an artist, even when he writes of the latest *nouvelle* of Gyp.

Criticism, France tell us on one page, *flottera toujours dans l'incertitude. Ses lois ne seront point fixes, ses jugements ne seront point irrévocables. Bien différente de la justice, elle fera peu de mal et peu de bien, si toutefois c'est faire peu de bien que d'amuser un moment les âmes délicates et curieuses.* Do not credit the caprice of so characteristic a modesty; that is not what he believes at all. Turn rather to another page, and read there: *Je crois que la critique, ou plutôt l'essai littéraire, est une forme exquise de l'histoire. Je dis plus: elle est la vraie histoire, celle de l'esprit humain. Elle exige, pour être bien traitée, des facultés rares et une culture savante. Elle suppose un affinement intellectuel que de longs siècles d'art ont pu seuls produire. C'est pourquoi elle ne se montre que dans les sociétés déjà vieilles, à l'heure exquise des premiers declins.* And, to add a sentence from yet another page: *La critique est la dernière en date de toutes les formes littéraires; elle finira peut-être par les absorber toutes.* But what is it that France understands by criticism? *Mon affaire*, he assures us, *n'est point d'analyser les livres: j'ai assez fait quand j'ai suggéré quelque haute curiosité au lecteur bienveillant.* Or, in his famous definition: *Le bon critique est celui qui raconte les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre.* It is an exquisite definition, exquisitely true of France himself. It would be easy to say that he is not a critic at all. But then he only professes to give us something of himself, as that something reveals itself at the contact of other minds, other souls, preserved to us in books. A book, for him, is *une œuvre de sorcellerie d'où s'échappent toutes sortes d'images qui troublent les esprits et changent les cœurs.* It delights him to come under this magic influence, he surrenders himself to it with a smiling, confident, sceptical,

and adventurous curiosity. He loves a book as a man might love a woman, and his criticism is a sort of fine flattery, or discreet raillery, full of sensibility, of intellectual emotion, in which a profound and exact learning disguises itself in order to be charming. What he says of Hamlet may be said of himself: *Il pense tour à tour comme un moine du moyen âge et comme un savant de la Renaissance ; il a la tête philosophique et pourtant pleine de diableries.* He is a survival of the Humanists of the Renaissance, with his intellectual curiosity in life and legend, in moral problems and the actual vices of real or imaginary people, in his urbane, philosophic malice, his gentle and pitiless wit. Naturally tolerant, sympathetic, benign, and at the same time *sûr de très peu de choses en ce monde*, he is very certain of stupidity or pretence when he sees it, and if, despite his aversion, he is obliged to contemplate and to comment upon it, his irony, in its very gentleness, has the cruelty of a cat holding a mouse between its velvet paws. Read him, for example, on Georges Ohnet. But that amusing castigation is scarcely typical of a writer who, like his master in so many things, Renan, prefers a certain elegance in evasion. He is always, in his own fashion, sincere; but he would rather not always be quite definite. "Sure of so little in this world," it pleases him to leave most large questions open; to discriminate without prejudice, to praise without rivalry, to dissent with an amiable smile: "No doubt there is quite as much, or nearly, to be said for your way of thinking as for mine!"

Creative, to a certain extent, in his criticism, the artist of a series of exquisite "confessions," France is always something of a critic in his fiction. There is just so much truth in that pose of his as an amateur in letters, that all his works are somewhat deliberate excursions in one direction or

another, experiments, sometimes, one fancies, done in order to show that they can be done, not from any very urgent impulse from within. As he is both a man of letters and a scholar, it is natural that he should have been tempted by legendary and mediæval subjects; and in *Thaïs*, for example, we have an admirable piece of craftsmanship, done absolutely from without, very beautifully and sympathetically, but with an art in which there is at all events no moment of illusion: sentiment, costume, *décor*, emotion, all are rendered with a sort of conscious propriety. The feeling, troubling as that would be if it were realised acutely, never touches us with any real sense of pity; it is treated with too elegant an aloofness, almost decoratively, as a remote, curious thing. It is antiquity apprehended, not as real life, really lived once long ago, but as ancient history, as recorded legend. In one book, however, *Le Lys Rouge*, which is a novel of contemporary life, he has succeeded in realising and in making us realise that quality of direct emotion which never elsewhere fully expresses itself in the rest of his elegant and exquisite work. It is a study in "modern love," the passion, with its curiosities of sentiment and sensation, its ecstasies and cruelties, set in a framework of literary and artistic society, some of the persons in which are exact portraits of real persons, Paul Verlaine, for instance. Here, for once, the scholar passes almost wholly into the sensitive, sympathetic artist; the gentle Epicurean, who smiles so urbanely upon the great and little distractions by which humanity amuses itself in that short interval given to it, is content to be absorbed in one or two definite men and women, to whom these distractions (as seen by the philosophic eye) are the only serious things in life. *La vérité*, as he tells us in a later, more reflective book, *Le Jardin d'Epicure*, *la vérité est que la*

vie est délicieuse, horrible, charmante, affreuse, douce, amère, et qu'elle est tout. And *Le Lys Rouge* gives us the sense of what is delicious, and horrible, and charming, and atrocious, and sweet, and bitter, in life lived fatally, absorbingly, exceptionally, as to the circumstances, and the course of them, in those passions by which alone we truly live. The scholar's subtlety has turned inwards upon the heart, and here, in this beautiful, painful, fascinating book, which really hurts one, we find what we have never found before in a writer who has been only too exclusively a literary man. *Et tout le reste est littérature!* we have now the excuse of saying, in that only comparatively disdainful outburst of Verlaine; and it is, after all, not as the writer of *Le Lys Rouge* that France presents himself under his normal aspect. Let us not try to sum him up, to bring him under any formula, to explain why he is what he is, and why he has his exceptions from himself; let us leave him a little vague, infinitely charming, not quite satisfying if he is to be judged among the great writers; an artist in style, in thought, in sensibility, in scholarship; not a critic, as the world looks upon criticism, yet above all, in the fine sense, a critic of literature and of life; definitely at least, and finally, a man of letters, the typical scholar of letters of our day.

CONCLUSION

OUR only chance, in this world, of a complete happiness, lies in the measure of our success in shutting the eyes of the mind, and deadening its sense of hearing, and dulling the keenness of its apprehension of the unknown. Knowing so much less than nothing, for we are entrapped in smiling and many-coloured appearances, our life may seem to be but a little space of leisure, in which it will be the necessary business of each of us to speculate on what is so rapidly becoming the past and so rapidly becoming the future, that scarcely existing present which is after all our only possession. Yet, as the present passes from us, hardly to be enjoyed except as memory or as hope, and only with an at best partial recognition of the uncertainty or inutility of both, it is with a kind of terror that we wake up, every now and then, to the whole knowledge of our ignorance, and to some perception of where it is leading us. To live through a single day with that overpowering consciousness of our real position, which, in the moments in which alone it mercifully comes, is like blinding light or the thrust of a flaming sword, would drive any man out of his senses. It is our hesitations, the excuses of our hearts, the compromises of our intelligence, which save us. We can forget so much, we can bear suspense with so fortunate an evasion of its real issues ; we are so admirably finite.

And so there is a great, silent conspiracy between us to

forget death; all our lives are spent in busily forgetting death. That is why we are active about so many things which we know to be unimportant; why we are so afraid of solitude, and so thankful for the company of our fellow-creatures. Allowing ourselves, for the most part, to be but vaguely conscious of that great suspense in which we live, we find our escape from its sterile, annihilating reality in many dreams, in religion, passion, art; each a forgetfulness, each a symbol of creation; religion being the creation of a new heaven, passion the creation of a new earth, and art, in its mingling of heaven and earth, the creation of heaven out of earth. Each is a kind of sublime selfishness, the saint, the lover, and the artist having each an incommunicable ecstasy which he esteems as his ultimate attainment, however, in his lower moments, he may serve God in action, or do the will of his mistress, or minister to men by showing them a little beauty. But it is, before all things, an escape; and the prophets who have redeemed the world, and the artists who have made the world beautiful, and the lovers who have quickened the pulses of the world, have really, whether they knew it or not, been fleeing from the certainty of one thought: that we have, all of us, only our one day; and from the dread of that other thought: that the day, however used, must after all be wasted.

The fear of death is not cowardice; it is, rather, an intellectual dissatisfaction with an enigma which has been presented to us, and which can be solved only when its solution is of no further use. All we have to ask of death is the meaning of life, and we are waiting all through life to ask that question. That life should be happy or unhappy, as those words are used, means so very little; and the heightening or lessening of the general felicity of the world means so

little to any individual. There is something almost vulgar in happiness which does not become joy, and joy is an ecstasy which can rarely be maintained in the soul for more than the moment during which we recognise that it is not sorrow. Only very young people want to be happy. What we all want is to be quite sure that there is something which makes it worth while to go on living, in what seems to us our best way, at our finest intensity; something beyond the mere fact that we are satisfying a sort of inner logic (which may be quite faulty) and that we get our best makeshift for happiness on that so hazardous assumption.

Well, the doctrine of Mysticism, with which all this symbolical literature has so much to do, of which it is all so much the expression, presents us, not with a guide for conduct, not with a plan for our happiness, not with an explanation of any mystery, but with a theory of life which makes us familiar with mystery, and which seems to harmonise those instincts which make for religion, passion, and art, freeing us at once of a great bondage. The final uncertainty remains, but we seem to knock less helplessly at closed doors, coming so much closer to the once terrifying eternity of things about us, as we come to look upon these things as shadows, through which we have our shadowy passage. "For in the particular acts of human life," Plotinus tells us, "it is not the interior soul and the true man, but the exterior shadow of the man alone, which laments and weeps, performing his part on the earth as in a more ample and extended scene, in which many shadows of souls and phantom scenes appear." And as we realise the identity of a poem, a prayer, or a kiss, in that spiritual universe which we are weaving for ourselves, each out of a thread of the great fabric; as we realise the infinite insignificance of action, its immense

distance from the current of life; as we realise the delight of feeling ourselves carried onward by forces which it is our wisdom to obey; it is at least with a certain relief that we turn to an ancient doctrine, so much the more likely to be true because it has so much the air of a dream. On this theory alone does all life become worth living, all art worth making, all worship worth offering. And because it might slay as well as save, because the freedom of its sweet captivity might so easily become deadly to the fool, because that is the hardest path to walk in where you are told only, walk well; it is perhaps the only counsel of perfection which can ever really mean much to the artist.

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(1848–1887)

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THOMAS GORDON HAKE

(1809–1895)

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FRANCIS THOMPSON

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II

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GÉRARD DE NERVAL

(1808–1855)

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The sonnets, written at different periods and published for the first time in the collection of 1854, "Les Filles du Feu," which also contains "Sylvie," were reprinted in the volume of *Poésies Complètes*, where they are imbedded in the midst of deplorable juvenilia. All, or almost all, of the verse worth preserving was collected, in 1897, by that delicate amateur of the curiosities of beauty, M. Remy de Gourmont, in a tiny volume called *Les Chimères*, which contains the six sonnets of "Les Chimères," the sonnet called "Vers Dorés," the five sonnets of "Le Christ aux Oliviers," and, in facsimile of the autograph, the lyric called "Les Cydalises." The true facts of the life of Gérard have been told for the first time, from original documents, by Mme. Arvède Barine, in two excellent articles in the *Revue des Deux*

Mondes, October 15 and November 1, 1897, since reprinted in *Les Nevrosés*, 1898; and, later, by M. G. Labrunie de Ferrières, in *La Vie et l'Œuvre de Gérard de Nerval*, 1906.

VILLIERS DE L'ISLE-ADAM

(1838–1889)

Premières Poésies, 1859; *Isis*, 1862; *Elën*, 1864; *Morgane*, 1865; *Claire Lenoir* (in the *Revue des Lettres et des Arts*), 1867; *L'Evasion*, 1870; *La Révolte*, 1870; *Azraël*, 1878; *Le Nouveau Monde*, 1880; *Contes Cruels*, 1880; *L'Ève Future*, 1886; *Akëdysséril*, 1886; *L'Amour Suprême*, 1886; *Tribulat Bonhomet*, 1887; *Histoires Insolites*, 1888; *Nouveaux Contes Cruels*, 1889; *Axël*, 1890; *Chez les Passants*, 1890; *Propos d' Au-delà*, 1893; *Histoires Souveraines*, 1899 (a selection).

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A sympathetic, but slightly vague, Life of Villiers was written by his cousin, Vicomte Robert de Pontavice de Heussey: *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, 1893; it was translated into English by Lady Mary Lloyd, 1894. See Verlaine's *Poètes Maudits*, 1884, and his biography of Villiers in *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*, the series of penny biographies, with caricature portraits, published by Vanier; also Mallarmé's *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, the reprint of a lecture given at Brussels a few months after Villiers' death. *La Révolte* was translated by Mrs. Theresa Barclay in the *Fortnightly Review*, December, 1897, and acted in London by the New Stage Club in 1906. I have translated a little poem, *Aveu*, from the interlude of verse in the *Contes Cruels* called *Chant d'Amour*, in *Days and Nights*, 1889. An article of mine, the

first, I believe, to be written on Villiers in English, appeared in the *Woman's World* in 1889; another in the *Illustrated London News* in 1891.

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

(1854–1891)

Une Saison en Enfer, 1873; *Les Illuminations*, 1886; *Reliquaire*, 1891 (containing several poems falsely attributed to Rimbaud); *Les Illuminations*: *Une Saison en Enfer*, 1892; *Poésies Complètes*, 1895; *Œuvres*, 1898.

See also Paterne Berrichon, *La Vie de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud*, 1898, and *Lettres de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud*, 1899; Paul Verlaine, *Les Poètes Maudits*, 1884, and the biography by Verlaine in *Les Hommes d'Aujourd'hui*. Mr. George Moore was the first to write about Rimbaud in England, in "Two Unknown Poets" (Rimbaud and Laforgue) in *Impressions and Opinions*, 1891. In Mr. John Gray's *Silverpoints*, 1893, there are translations of "Charleville" and "Sensation." The latter, and "Les Chercheuses de Poux," are translated by Mr. T. Sturge Moore in *The Vinedresser, and other Poems*, 1899.

PAUL VERLAINE

(1884–1896)

Poèmes Saturniens, 1866; *Fêtes Galantes*, 1869; *La Bonne Chanson*, 1870; *Romances sans Paroles*, 1874; *Sagesse*, 1881; *Les Poètes Maudits*, 1884; *Jadis et Naguère*, 1884; *Les Mémoires d'un Veuf*, 1886; *Louise Leclercq* (suivi de *Le Poteau, Pierre Duchatelet, Madame Aubin*), 1887; *Amour*, 1888; *Parallèlement*, 1889; *Dédicaces*, 1890; *Bonheur*, 1891; *Mes Hôpitaux*, 1891; *Chansons pour Elle*, 1891; *Liturgies Intimes*, 1892; *Mes Prisons*, 1893; *Odes en son Honneur*, 1893; *Elégies* 1893; *Quinze Jours en Hollande*, 1894; *Dans les Limbes*, 1894; *Epigrammes*, 1894; *Confessions*. 1895; *Chair*, 1896; *Invectives*, 1896; *Voyage en France d'un Français* (posthumous), 1907.

The complete works of Verlaine are now published in

six volumes at the Librairie Léon Vanier (now Messein); the text is very incorrectly printed, and it is still necessary to refer to the earlier editions in separate volumes. A *Choix de Poésies*, 1891, with a preface by François Coppée, and a reproduction of Carrière's admirable portrait, is published in one volume by Charpentier; the series of *Hommes d'Aujourd'hui* contains twenty-seven biographical notices by Verlaine; and a considerable number of poems and prose articles exists, scattered in various magazines, some of them English, such as the *Senate*; in some cases the articles themselves are translated into English, such as "My Visit to London," in the *Savoy* for April 1896, and "Notes on England: Myself as a French Master," and "Shakespeare and Racine," in the *Fortnightly Review* for July 1894 and September 1894. The first English translation in verse from Verlaine is Arthur O'Shaughnessy's rendering of "Clair de Lune" in *Fêtes Galantes*, under the title "Pastel," in *Songs of a Worker*, 1881. A volume of translations in verse, *Poems of Verlaine*, by Gertrude Hall, was published in America in 1895. In Mr. John Gray's *Silverpoints*, 1893, there are translations of "Parsifal," "A Crucifix," "Le Chevalier Malheur," "Spleen," "Clair de Lune," "Mon Dieu m'a dit," and "Green." A complete translation of the *Fêtes Galantes*, together with poems from many other volumes, will be found in a small book which is meant to be a kind of supplement to this one.

As I have mentioned, there have been many portraits of Verlaine. The three portraits drawn on lithographic paper by Mr. Rothenstein, and published in 1898, are but the latest, if also among the best, of a long series, of which Mr. Rothenstein himself has done two or three others, one of which was reproduced in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1894, when Verlaine was in London. M. F. A. Cazals, a young artist who was one of Verlaine's most intimate friends, has done I should not like to say how many portraits, some of which he has gathered together in a little book, *Paul Verlaine: ses Portraits*, 1898. There are portraits in nine of Verlaine's own books, several of them by M. Cazals (roughly jotted, expressive notes of

moments), one by M. Anquetin (a strong piece of thinking flesh and blood), and in the *Choix de Poésies* there is a reproduction of the cloudy, inspired poet of Eugène Carrière's painting. Another portrait, which I have not seen, but which Verlaine himself calls, in the *Dédicaces*, *un portrait enfin reposé*, was done by M. Aman-Jean. M. Niederhausern has done a bust in bronze, Mr. Rothenstein a portrait medallion. A new edition of the *Confessions*, 1899, contains a number of sketches ; *Verlaine Dessinateur*, 1896, many more ; and there are yet others in the extremely objectionable book of M. Charles Donos, *Verlaine Intime*, 1898. The *Hommes d'Aujourd'hui* contains a caricature-portrait, many other portraits have appeared in French and English and German and Italian magazines, and there is yet another portrait in the admirable little book of Charles Morice, *Paul Verlaine*, 1888, which contains by far the best study that has ever been made of Verlaine as a poet. I believe Mr. George Moore's article, " A Great Poet," reprinted in *Impressions and Opinions*, 1891, was the first that was written on Verlaine in England ; my own article in the *National Review* in 1892 was, I believe, the first detailed study of the whole of his work up to that date. At last, in the *Vie de Paul Verlaine* of Edmund Lepelletier, there has come the authentic record.

JULES LAFORGUE

(1860–1887)

Les Complaintes, 1885 ; *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune*, 1886 ; *Le Concile Féerique*, 1886 ; *Moralités Légendaires*, 1887 ; *Derniers Vers*, 1890 (a privately printed volume, containing *Des Fleurs de Bonne Volonté*, *Le Concile Féerique*, and *Derniers Vers*) ; *Poésies Complètes*, 1894 ; *Œuvres Complètes, Poésies, Moralités, Légendaires, Mélanges Posthumes* (3 vols.), 1902, 1903.

An edition of the *Moralités Légendaires* in two volumes was published in 1897, under the care of M. Lucien Pissarro, at the Sign of the Dial ; it is printed in Mr. Ricketts' admirable type, and makes one of the most beautiful books issued in

French during this century. In 1896 M. Camille Mauclair, with his supple instinct for contemporary values, wrote a study, or rather an eulogy, of Laforgue, to which M. Maeterlinck contributed a few searching and delicate words by way of preface.

STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ

(1842–1898)

Le Corbeau (traduit de Poe), 1875 ; *La Dernière Mode*, 1875 ; *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, 1876 ; *Le Vathek de Beckford*, 1876 ; *Petite Philologie à l'Usage des Classes et du Monde* : *Les Mots Anglais*, 1877 ; *Poésies Complètes* (photogravées sur le manuscrit), 1887 ; *Les Poèmes de Poe*, 1888 ; *Le Ten o'clock de M. Whistler*, 1888 ; *Pages*, 1891 ; *Les Miens* : *Villiers de l'Isle-Adam*, 1892 ; *Vers et Prose*, 1892 ; *La Musique et les Lettres* (Oxford, Cambridge), 1894 ; *Divagations*, 1897 ; *Poésies*, 1899.

See, on this difficult subject, Edmund Gosse, *Questions at Issue*, 1893, in which will be found the first study of Mallarmé that appeared in English ; and Vittorio Pica, *Letteratura d'Eccezione*, 1899, which contains a carefully-documented study of more than a hundred pages. There is a translation of the poem called " Fleurs " in Mr. John Gray's *Silverpoints*, 1893, and translations of " Hérodiade " and three shorter poems will be found in the first volume of my collected poems. Several of the poems in prose have been translated into English ; my translation of the " Plainte d'Automne," contained in this volume, was made in momentary forgetfulness that the same poem in prose had already been translated by Mr. George Moore in *Confessions of a Young Man*. Mr. Moore also translated " Le Phénomène Futur " in the *Savoy*, July 1896.

JORIS KARL HUYSMANS

(1848–1907)

Le Drageoir à Épices, 1874 ; *Marthe, Histoire d'une Fille*, 1876 ; *Les Sœurs Vatard*, 1879 ; *Croquis Parisiens*, 1880 ;

En Ménage, 1881; *A Vau-l'Eau*, 1882; *L'Art Moderne*, 1883; *A Rebours*, 1884; *Un Dilemme*, 1887; *En Rade*, 1887; *Certains*, 1889; *La Bièvre*, 1890; *Là-Bas*, 1891; *En Route*, 1895; *La Cathédrale*, 1898; *La Bièvre et Saint-Séverin*, 1898; *Pages Catholiques*, 1900; *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam*, 1901; *De Tout*, 1902; *L'Oblat*, 1903; *Trois Primitifs*, 1905; *Les Foules de Lourdes*, 1906. See also the short story, *Sac au Dos*, in the *Soirées de Medan*, 1880, and the pantomime, *Pierrot Sceptique*, 1881, in collaboration with Léon Hennique. *En Route* was translated into English by Mr. Kegan Paul, in 1896; and *La Cathédrale* by Miss Clara Bell, in 1898.

I have been concerned here only with Huysmans under his latest aspect, but I may preserve from an article in the *Fortnightly Review* of March 1892, as not perhaps without some psychological interest, a personal impression of the man, which I made at the time when he was writing *Là-Bas*.

" To realise how faithfully and how completely Huysmans has revealed himself in all he has written, it is necessary to know the man. 'He gave me the impression of a cat,' some interviewer once wrote of him: 'courteous, perfectly polite, almost amiable, but all nerves, ready to shoot out his claws at the least word.' And, indeed, there is something of his favourite animal about him. The face is grey, wearily alert, with a look of benevolent malice. At first sight it is commonplace, the features are ordinary, one seems to have seen it at the Bourse or the Stock Exchange. But gradually that strange, unvarying expression, that look of benevolent malice, grows upon you, as the influence of the man makes itself felt. I have seen Huysmans in his office: he was formerly an employé ('Sous-chef de bureau à la direction de la sûreté générale') in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a model employé; I have seen him in a café, in various houses; but I always see him in memory as I used to see him at the house of the bizarre Madame X. He leans back on the sofa, rolling a cigarette between his thin, expressive fingers, looking at no one and at nothing, while Madame X.

moves about with solid vivacity in the midſt of her extraordinary menagerie of *bric-à-brac.* The spoils of all the world are there, in that incredibly tiny *salon* ; they lie underfoot, they climb up walls, they cling to screens, brackets, and tables ; one of your elbows menaces a Japanese toy, the other a Dresden china shepherdess ; all the colours of the rainbow clash in a barbaric discord of notes. And in a corner of this fantaſtic room, Huysmans lies back indifferently on the sofa, with the air of one perfectly resigned to the boredom of life. Something is said by my learned friend who is to write for the new periodical, or perhaps it is the young editor of the new periodical who speaks, or (if that were not impossible) the taciturn Englishman who accompanies me ; and Huysmans, without looking up, and without taking the trouble to speak very diſtinctly, picks up the phrase, transforms it, more likely transpierces it, in a perfectly turned sentence, a phrase of impromptu elaboration. Perhaps it is only a ſtupid book that some one has mentioned, or a ſtupid woman ; as he speaks, the book looms up before one, becomes monſtrous in its dulness, a maſterpiece and miracle of imbecility ; the unimportant little woman grows into a slow horror before your eyes. It is always the unpleasant aſpect of things that he seizes, but the intensity of his revolt from that unpleasantness brings a touch of the sublime into the very expression of his diſguſt. Every sentence is an epigram, and every epigram slaughters a reputation or an idea. He speaks with an accent as of pained surprise, an amused look of contempt, so profound that it becomes almoſt pity, for human imbecility."

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

(1862)

Serres Chaudes, 1889 ; *La Princesse Maleine*, 1890 ; *Les Aveugles* (*L'Intruse*, *Les Aveugles*), 1890 ; *L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*, *de Ruysbroeck l'Admirable*, 1891 ; *Les Sept Princesses*, 1891 ; *Pelléas et Mélisande*, 1892 ; *Alladine*

et Palomides, *Intérieur*, *La Mort de Tintagiles*, 1894 ; *Annabella*, *de John Ford*, 1895 ; *Les Disciples à Saïs et les Fragments de Novalis*, 1895 ; *Le Trésor des Humbles*, 1896 ; *Douze Chansons*, 1896 ; *Aglavaine et Sélysette*, 1896 ; *La Sagesse et la Destinée*, 1898 ; *Théâtre*, 1901 (3 vols.) ; *La Vie des Abeilles*, 1901 ; *Monna Vanna*, 1902 ; *Le Temple Enseveli*, 1902 ; *Joyzelle*, 1903 ; *Le Double Jardin*, 1904 ; *L'Intelligence des Fleurs*, 1907 : *L'Oiseau Bleu*, 1909 ; *Monna Vanna*, 1911 ; *Marie-Magdeleine*, 1913 ; *Les Débris de la Guerre*, 1916 ; *L'Hôte Inconnue*, 1917 ; *Les Sentiers dans la Montagne*, 1919 ; *Le Bourgmestre de Stilmonde*, 1920 ; *Le Miracle de Saint Antoine*, 1920 ; *Le Grand Secret*, 1921.

Maeterlinck had the good or bad fortune to be more promptly, and more violently, praised at the beginning of his career than at all events any other writer of whom I have spoken in this volume. His fame in France was made by a flaming article of M. Octave Mirbeau in the *Figaro* of August 24, 1890. M. Mirbeau greeted him as the " Belgian Shakespeare," and expressed his opinion of *La Princesse Maleine* by saying " M. Maeterlinck has given us the greatest work of genius that has been produced in our time, and the most extraordinary and the most naïve too, comparable (dare I say ?) superior in beauty to what is most beautiful in Shakespeare . . . more tragic than *Macbeth*, more extraordinary in thought than *Hamlet*." Mr. William Archer introduced Maeterlinck to England in an article called " A Pessimist Playwright " in the *Fortnightly Review*, September 1891. Less enthusiastic than M. Mirbeau, he defined the author of *La Princesse Maleine* as " a Webster who had read Alfred de Musset." A freely adapted version of *L'Intruse* was given by Tree at the Haymarket Theatre, January 27, 1892, and since that time many of Maeterlinck's plays have been acted, without cuts, or with but few cuts, at various London theatres. The earliest of his books to be translated into English were : *The Princesse Maleine* (by Gerard Harry) and *The Intruder* (by William Wilson), 1892 ; *Pelléas and Mélisanda* and *The Sightless* (by Laurence Alma-Tadema), 1892 ; *Ruysbroeck and the Mystics* (by J. T. Stoddart), 1894 ;

The Treasure of the Humble (by A. Sutro), 1897; *Aglavaine and Sélysette* (by A. Sutro), 1897; *Wisdom and Destiny* (by A. Sutro), 1898; *Alladine and Palomides* (by A. Sutro), *Interior* (by William Archer), and *The Death of Tintagiles* (by A. Sutro), 1899. The later plays and essays have all been translated into English, for the most part simultaneously with their appearance in French.

I have spoken, in this volume, chiefly of Maeterlinck's essays, and but little of his plays, and I have said all that I had to say without special reference to the second volume of essays, *La Sagesse et la Destinée*. Like *Le Trésor des Humbles*, that book is a message, a doctrine, even more than it is a piece of literature. It is a treatise on wisdom and happiness, on the search for happiness because it is wisdom, not for wisdom because it is happiness. It is a book of patient and resigned philosophy, a very Flemish philosophy, more resigned than even *Le Trésor des Humbles*. In a sense it seems to aim less high. An ecstatic mysticism has given way to a kind of prudence. Is this coming nearer to the earth really an intellectual ascent or descent? At least it is a divergence, and it probably indicates a divergence in art as well as in meditation. Yet, while it is quite possible to at least indicate Maeterlinck's position as a philosopher, it seems to me premature to attempt to define his position as a dramatist. Interesting as his dramatic work has always been, there is, in the later dramas, so singular an advance in all the qualities that go to make great art, that I find it impossible, at this stage of his development, to treat his dramatic work as in any sense the final expression of a personality. What the next stage of his development may be it is impossible to say. He will not write more beautiful dramas than he has written in *Aglavaine et Sélysette* and in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. But he may, and he probably will, write something which will move the general world more profoundly, touching it more closely, in the manner of the great writers, in whom beauty has not been more beautiful than in writers less great, but has come to men with a more splendid energy.

Was I, when I wrote that, anticipating *Monna Vanna?*

THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

(1811–1872)

Les Poésies de Théophile Gautier, 1830 ; *Albertus, ou l'Ame et le Péché*, 1833 ; *Les Jeune-France*, 1833 ; *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, 1835 ; *Fortunio*, 1838 ; *La Comédie de la Mort*, 1838 ; *Tra los montes*, 1839 ; *Une Larme du Diable*, 1839 ; *Gisèle*, ballet 1841 ; *Un Voyage en Espagne*, 1843 ; *La Péri*, ballet, 1843 ; *Les Grotesques*, 1844 ; *Une Nuit de Cléopâtre*, 1845 ; *Premières Poésies* ; *Albertus* ; *La Comédie de la Mort* ; *Les Intérieurs et les Paysages*, 1845 ; *Zigzags*, 1845 ; *Le Tricorne enchanté*, etc., 1845 ; *La Turquie*, 1846 ; *La Juive de Constantine*, drame 1846 ; *Jean et Jeannette*, 1846 ; *Le Roi Candaule*, 1847 ; *Les Roués innocents*, 1847 ; *Histoire des peintres* (with Ch. Blanc), 1847 ; *Regardez, mais n'y touchez pas*, 1847 ; *Les Fêtes de Madrid*, 1847 ; *Partie carrée*, 1851 ; *Italia*, 1852 ; *Les Emaux et Camées*, 1852 ; *L'Art moderne*, 1852 ; *Les Beaux-Arts en Europe*, 1852 ; *Caprices et Zigzags*, 1852 ; *Aria Marcella*, 1852 ; *Gemma*, 1854 ; *Constantinople*, 1854 ; *Théâtre de poche*, 1855 ; *Le Roman de la Momie*, 1856 ; *Jettatura*, 1857 ; *Avatar*, 1857 ; *Sakountala*, ballet, 1858 ; *H. de Balzac*, 1859 ; *Les Vosges*, 1860 ; *Trésors d'art de la Russie*, 1860–1863 ; *Histoire de l'art théâtral en Franc depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 1860 ; *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, 1863 ; *Les Dieux et les Demi-Dieux de la peinture* (with Arsène Houssaye et P. de Saint-Victor), 1863 ; *Poésies nouvelles*, 1863 ; *Loin de Paris*, 1864 ; *La Belle Jenny*, 1864 ; *Quand on voyage*, 1865 ; *La Peau de tigre*, 1865 ; *Voyage en Russie*, 1866 ; *Spirite*, 1866 ; *Le Palais pompéien de l'avenue Montaigne*, 1866 ; *Rapport sur le progrès des lettres* (with Sylvestre de Sacy, Paul Féval et Edouard Thiers), 1868 ; *Ménagerie intime*, 1869 ; *La Nature chez elle*, 1870 ; *Tableaux de siège*, 1871 ; *Théâtre : mystères, comédies et ballets*, 1872 ; *Portraits contemporains*, 1874 ; *Histoire du romantisme*, 1874 ; *Portraits et Souvenirs littéraires*, 1875 ; *Poésies complètes*, 2 vols., 1876 ; *L'Orient*, 2 vols., 1877 ; *Fusains et Eaux-Fortes*, 1880 ; *Tableaux à la plume*, 1880 ; *Mademoiselle Daphné* ; *La Toison d'or*, etc., 1881 ; *Guide de*

l'amateur au musée du Louvre, 1882 ; *Souvenirs de théâtre, d'art et de critique*, 1883.

THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

(1823–1891)

Les Cariatides, 1842 ; *Les Stalactites*, 1846 ; *Les Nations*, opéra-ballet, 1851 ; *Le Feuilleton d'Aristophane*, pièce (with Boyer), 1852 ; *Les Saltimbanques*, 1853 ; *Les Odelettes*, 1856 ; *Le Beau Léandre*, pièce en un acte, 1856 ; *Odes funambulesques*, 1857 ; *Poésies complètes*, 1857 ; *Le Cousin du roi*, pièce en un acte (with Boyer), 1857 ; *Odes funambulesques*, édition revue et augmentée, 1859 ; *Esquisses parisiennes*, 1859 ; *Diane au bois*, comédie héroïque, 1863 ; *Les Fourberies de Nérine*, comédie en un acte, 1864 ; *La Pomme*, comédie en un acte, 1865 ; *Gringoire*, comédie en un acte, 1866 ; *Les Exilés*, 1866 ; *Les Parisiennes de Paris*, réimpression des *Esquisses parisiennes*, 1866 ; *Les Camées parisiens*, 1866 ; *Nouvelles Odes funambulesques*, 1869 ; *Florise*, 1870 ; *Idylles prussiennes*, 1871 ; *Petit Traité de la poésie française*, 1872 ; *Les Princesses*, 1874 ; *Trente-Six Ballades joyeuses*, 1875 ; *Déidamia*, comédie, 1876 ; *Comédies*, 1879 ; *Contes pour les femmes*, 1881 ; *Contes féeriques*, 1882 ; *Mes Souvenirs*, 1882 ; *Contes héroïques*, 1884 ; *Dames et Demoiselles et Fables choisies, mises en prose*, 1886 ; *Socrate et sa Femme*, comédie, 1886 ; *Le Forgeron*, 1887 ; *Madame Robert*, 1887 ; *Le Baiser*, comédie en vers, 1888 ; *Scènes de la Vie* : *Les Belles Poupées*, 1888 ; *Les Cariatides* ; *Roses de Noël*, 1889 ; *Les Exilés* ; *Les Princesses*, 1890 ; *Petites Études* ; *L'Ame de Paris* ; *Nouveaux Souvenirs*, prose, 1890 ; *Poésies nouvelles* ; *Sonnailles et Clochettes*, 1890 ; *Le Sang de la coupe* ; *Trente-six Ballades joyeuses* ; *Le Baiser*, 1890 ; *Marcel Rabe*, 1891 ; *Idylles prussiennes* ; *Riquet à la houppe*, 1891 ; *Occidentales* ; *Rimes dorées*, 1891 ; *Dans la fournaise*, 1892 ; *Ésope*, comédie, 1893.

HENRY MURGER

(1822–1861)

Scènes de la Vie de Bohême, 1851 ; *Le Pays Latin*, 1851 ; *Scènes de la Vie de Jeunesse*, 1851 ; *Le Bonhomme jadis*, pièce en un acte, 1852 ; *Propos de Ville et Propos de Théâtre*, 1853, 1859 ; *Scènes de Campagne*, 1854 ; *Le Roman de Toutes les Femmes*, 1854 ; *Ballades et Fantaisies*, 1854 ; *Le Sabot Rouge*, 1860 ; *Le Serment d'Horace*, 1860 ; *Les Nuits d'Hiver*, 1861.

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

(1767–1830)

Adolphe, 1816 ; *Annales de la Science*, 1817, 1818 ; *Appel en faveur des Grecs*, 1825 ; *Collection complète des Ouvrages publiés sur le Gouvernement représentatif*, 1817 ; *De la religion dans la source*, 1809 ; *Wallenstein*, 1809 ; *Mémoires sur les Cent Jours*, 1829 ; *Mélanges de Littérature et de politique*, 1829 ; *Du polythéisme romain*, 1833 ; *Cours de Politique constitutionnelle*, 1836 ; *Journal Intime*, 1895.

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

(1850–1893)

Des Vers, 1880 ; *Boule de suif*, 1880 ; *La Maison Tellier*, 1881 ; *Mademoiselle Fifi*, 1882 ; *Les Contes de la bécasse*, 1883 ; *Une Vie* (1883) ; *Clair de lune*, 1883 ; *Au Soleil*, 1884 ; *Les Sœurs Rondoli*, 1884 ; *Miss Harriett*, 1884 ; *Bel-Ami*, 1885 ; *Yvette*, 1885 ; *Contes du jour et de la nuit*, 1885 ; *Contes et Nouvelles*, 1885 ; *La Petite Rogue*, 1886 ; *Monsieur Parent*, 1886 ; *Toine*, 1886 ; *Mont-Oriol*, 1887 ; *Le Horla*, 1887 ; *Pierre et Jean*, 1888 ; *Sur l'eau*, 1888 ; *Le Rosier de Madame Husson*, 1888 ; *La Main gauche*, 1889 ; *Fort comme la mort*, 1889 ; *L'Inutile Beauté*, 1890 ; *Notre Cœur*, 1890 ; *La Vie errante*, 1890 ; *Musotte*, pièce en trois actes (with Jacques Normand), 1891 ; *La Paix du ménage*, pièce en deux actes, 1893.

LECONTE DE LISLE

(1818–1896)

Poèmes antiques, 1852 ; *Poèmes et Poésies*, 1854 ; *Le Chemin de la croix*, 1859 ; *Idylles de Théocrite*, 1861 ; *Odes anacréontiques*, 1861 ; *Poèmes barbares*, 1862 ; *Iliade*, 1866 ; *Odyssée*, 1867 ; *Hésiode*, 1869 ; *Les Hymnes orphiques*, 1869 ; *Le Catéchisme populaire républicain*, 1871 ; *Œuvres complètes d'Eschyle*, 1872 ; *Les Erinnyes*, 1872 ; *Œuvres d'Horace*, 1873 ; *Œuvres de Sophocle*, 1877 ; *Œuvres d'Euripide*, 1885 ; *Poèmes tragiques*, 1886 ; *Discours de réception à l'Académie française*, 1887 ; *L'Apollonide, drame lyrique*, 1888 ; *Derniers Poèmes*, 1895.

CATULLE MENDÈS

(1842–1907)

Le Roman d'une nuit, 1863 ; *Philoméla*, 1864 ; *Histoires d'amour*, 1868 ; *Hespérus*, poème, 1869 ; *Nuits sans étoiles* (traduit de E. Glaser), 1869 ; *Contes épiques*, 1870 ; *La Colère d'un franc-tireur*, poème, 1871 ; *Odelette guerrière*, 1871 ; *Les Soixante-treize Journées de la Commune*, 1871 ; *La Part du roi*, comédie, 1872 ; *Les Frères d'armes*, drame, 1873 ; *Poésies*, 1re série : *Le Soleil de minuit*, *Soirs moroses*, *Contes épiques*, *Intermède*, *Hespérus*, *Philoméla*, *Sonnets*, *Panteleïa*, *Pagode*, *Sérénades*, 1876 ; *Justice*, drame en trois actes, 1877 ; *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, opéra-comique, 1878 ; *La Vie et la Mort d'un clown : la Demoiselle en or*, 1879 ; *La Vie et la Mort d'un clown* : *La Petite Impératrice*, 1879 ; *Les Mères ennemies*, 1880 ; *La Divine Aventure* (with R. Lesclide), 1881 ; *Le Roi vierge*, 1881 ; *Le Crime du vieux Blas*, 1882 ; *Monstres parisiens*, 1re série, 1882 ; *L'Amour qui pleure et L'Amour qui rit*, 1883 ; *Les Folies amoureuses*, 1883 ; *Le Roman d'une nuit*, réédition 1883 ; *Les Boudoirs de verre*, 1884 ; *Jeunes Filles*, 1884 ; *Jupe courte*, 1884 ; *La Légende du Parnasse Contemporain*, 1884 ; *Les Mères ennemies*, drame, 1883 ; *Les Contes du rouet*, 1885 ; *Le Fin du fin ou Conseils à un jeune homme qui se destine à l'amour*, 1885 ; *Les Iles d'amour*, 1885 ; *Lila et Colette*, 1885 ; *Poésies* (7 vols.), 1885 ; *Le Rose et la Noir*, 1885 ; *Tous les baisers*, 1884–1885) ; *Contes choisis*, 1886 ; *Gwendoline*, opéra ;

Lesbia, 1886 ; *Un Miracle de Notre-Dame*, 1886 ; *Pour les belles personnes*, 1886 ; *Richard Wagner*, 1886 ; *Toutes les amoureuses*, 1886 ; *Les Trois Chansons : la Chanson qui rit, la Chanson qui pleure, la Chanson qui rêve*, 1886 ; *Zo'har*, 1886 ; *Le Châtiment*, drame en vers, 1887 ; *L'Homme tout nu*, 1887 ; *Pour lire au couvent*, 1887 ; *La Première Maîtresse*, 1887 ; *Robe montante*, 1887 ; *Le Roman rouge*, 1887 ; *Tendrement*, 1887 ; *L'Envers des feuilles*, 1888 ; *Grande Maguet*, 1888 ; *Les Oiseaux bleus*, 1888 ; *Les plus Jolies Chansons du pays de France*, choisies par Catulle Mendès, 1888 ; *Pour lire au bain*, 1888 ; *Le Souper des Pleureuses*, 1888 ; *Les Belles du monde : Gitanas, Javanaises, Egyptiennes, Sénégalaises* (with R. Darzens), 1889 ; *Le Bonheur des autres*, 1889 ; *Le Calendrier républicain* (with R. Lesclide), 1889–1890 ; *L'infidèle*, 1889 ; *Isoline*, conte de fées en dix tableaux, 1889 ; *Le Cruel Berceau*, 1889 ; *La Vie sérieuse*, 1889 ; *Le Confessionnal*, 1890 ; *Méphistophéla*, 1890 ; *Pierre le Véridique*, 1890 ; *La Princesse nue*, 1890 ; *La Femme enfant*, 1891 ; *Les Petites Fées en l'air*, 1891 ; *Pour dire devant le monde*, monologues et poésies, 1891 ; *Jeunes Filles*, réédition, 1892 ; *Les Poésies de Catulle Mendès* (3 vols.), 1892 ; *La Messe rose*, 1892 ; *Lieds de France*, 1892 ; *Luscignole*, 1892 ; *Les Joyeuses Commères de Paris* (with G. Courteline), 1892 ; *Les Meilleurs Contes*, 1892 ; *Isoline-Isolin*, 1893 ; *Le Docteur Blanc*, mimodrame fantastique, 1893 ; *Le Soleil de Paris*, 1893 ; *Nouveaux Contes de jadis*, 1893 ; *Poésies nouvelles*, 1893 ; *Ghéa*, poème dramatique, 1893 ; *L'Art d'aimer*, 1894 ; *La Maison de la vieille*, 1894 ; *Verger fleuri*, 1894 ; *L'Enfant amoureux*, 1895 ; *La Grive des vignes*, poésies, 1895 ; *Le Chemin du cœur*, 1895 ; *Rue des Filles-Dieu, 56, ou l'Heautonparatéroumène*, 1895 ; *L'Art au théâtre*, 1896 ; *Chand d'habits*, pantomime, 1896 ; *Gog*, 1897 ; *Arc-enciel et Sourcil rouge*, 1897 ; *L'Art au théâtre*, 1897 ; *Le Procès des roses*, pantomime, 1897 ; *Petits Poèmes russes mis en vers français*, 1897 ; *L'Evangile de l'enfance de N.-S. J.-C.*, 1897 ; *Le Chercheur de tares*, 1898 ; *Les Idylles galantes*, 1898 ; *Médée*, drame 1898 ; *La Reine Fiamette*, conte dramatique en vers, 1898 ; *Le Cygne*, ballet-pantomime, 1898 ; *Briséis*, drame musical, avec E. Mikhaël et Emm. Chabrier, 1899 ; *Farces*, 1899 ;

Les Braises du cendrier, poésies, 1900 ; *L'Art au théâtre*, troisième volume, 1900 ; *La Carmélite*, drame lyrique, 1902 ; *La Reine Fiamette*, drame lyrique, 1903 ; *Le Fils de l'Etoile*, drame lyrique, 1904 ; *Scarron*, comédie tragique, 1905 ; *Glatigny*, drame funambulesque, 1906 ; *Ariane*, opéra, musique de Massenet, 1906.

ANATOLE FRANCE

(1844–1924)

La Légende de Sainte Radegonde, 1859 ; *Alfred de Vigny*, 1868 ; *Les Poèmes dorés*, 1873 ; *Bernardin de Saint-Pierre*, 1875 ; *Racine et Nicole*, 1875 ; *Jean Racine*, 1876 ; *Les Noces Corinthiennes*, 1876 ; *Les Poèmes de J. Breton*, 1879 ; *Lucile de Chateaubriand*, 1879 ; *Jocaste et le Chat maigre*, 1878 ; *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, 1881 ; *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*, 1882 ; *Abeille*, 1883 ; *Le Livre de mon Ami*, 1885 ; *Nos Enfants*, 1887 ; *La Vie littéraire*, 1888–1892 ; *Balthazar*, 1889 ; *Thaïs*, 1892 ; *L'Etui de Nacre*, 1892 ; *Les Opinions de M. Jérome Coignard*, 1893 ; *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque*, 1893 ; *Le Jardin d'Epicure*, 1893 ; *Le Lys Rouge*, 1894 ; *Le Puits de Sainte Claire*, 1895 ; *L'Elvire de Lamartine*, 1896 ; *Poésies*, 1896 ; *Discours de réception à l'Académie*, 1896 ; *Pages choisies*, 1897 ; *L'Orme du Mail*, 1897 ; *Le Mannequin d'osier*, 1897 ; *La Leçon bien apprise*, 1898 ; *Au Petit Bonheur*, 1898 ; *Le Lys Rouge*, pièce, 1899 ; *Pierre Nozière*, 1899 ; *L'Anneau d'améthyste*, 1899 ; *Clio*, 1900 ; *M. Bergeret à Paris*, 1901 ; *Opinions Sociales*, 1902 ; *Histoire Comique* 1903 ; *Sur la Pierre Blanche*, 1903 ; *L'Eglise et la République*, 1904 ; *Crainquebille et autres Récits*, 1904 ; *Au Petit Bonheur*, comédie, 1906 ; *Les Contes de Jacques Tournebroche*, 1908 ; *L'Ile des Pingouins*, 1908 ; *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1908 ; *Les Sept Femmes de la Barbe-Bleue et autres contes merveilleux*, 1909 ; *Les Dieux Ont Soif*, 1912 ; *Le Génie Latin*, 1913 ; *La Comédie de Celui Qui Epousa Une Femme Muette*, 1913 ; *La Révolte des Anges*, 1914 ; *Le Petit Pierre*, 1918 ; *La Vie en Fleur*, 1922.

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